

*The American
Prisoner
A
Romance
of the West Country*



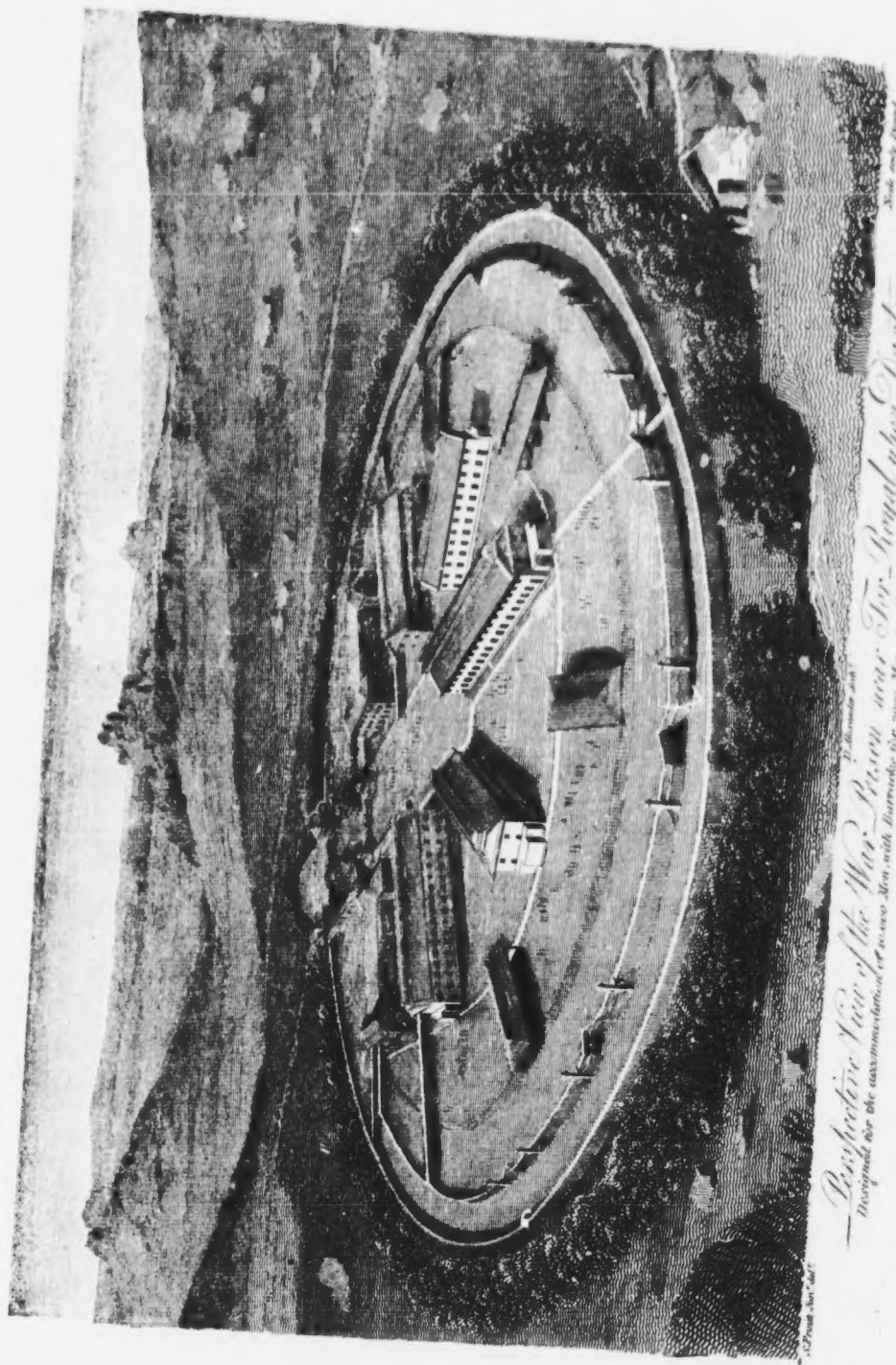
*By
Eden Phillpotts*

THE AMERICAN PRISONER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LYING PROPHETS
CHILDREN OF THE MIST
SONS OF THE MORNING
THE STRIKING HOURS
THE RIVER
MY DEVON YEAR

09500201



Perspective View of the USS Oregon, now in the Navy Yard at Portland, Ore. Designed for the accommodation of 1,000 men, with barracks for 2,000. Men at a short distance, but not represented in the picture.

THE AMERICAN PRISONER

BY
EDEN PHILLPOTTS

TORONTO
GEORGE N. MORANG & CO. LIMITED
1904

*Penitentiary View of the Miss. Prison near Troy. Royal who "Dustbowl"
Designed for the case/murdered of a slave Men with barbed wire 2000 Men at a short distance, but not represented in the Plan.
With only ground*

PR 5177

A63

1904

p***

Out of the land whence the 'Mayflower' sailed,

To

Jeannette L. Gilder

With hearty greeting



CONTENTS

BOOK I

FOX TOR FARM

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. CATER'S BEAM	3
II. THE MALHERB AMPHORA	10
III. BESIDE EXE	15
IV. "THE MARROW OF THE FARM"	22
V. DAWN	31
VI. MR. PETER NORCOT	36
VII. THE WAR PRISON	46
VIII. A LITTLE ACCIDENT	53
IX. CHILDE'S TOMB	62
X. THE FIRSTBORN	71
XI. MALHERB'S IDEA	80

BOOK II

THE SEVEN

I. MR. BLAZEY	87
II. A PRACE OF FOWLS	97
III. THE GREEN APPLE	103
IV. A FRIEND IN NEED	109
V. FOLLY	117
VI. THE PHILOSOPHY OF MR. NORCOT	126
VII. THE SEVEN FAIL	134
VIII. JOHN LEE'S FATHER	141
IX. GRACE MALHERB HEARS THE NEWS	146
X. HANGMAN'S HOLLOW	153
XI. FREE	161
XII. THE SNOWSTORM	171
XIII. A GRAVE IN THE HEATHER	178
XIV. THE OLD AND THE NEW	186
XV. STARK RIDES AWAY	194
XVI. GOOD NEWS	202

BOOK III

UNDER THE EARTH

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE TREASURE HOUSE	209
II. RHYME AND REASON	219
III. THE OATH	226
IV. JOHN TAKES HIS ROAD	232
V. STARS AND STRIPES	240
VI. UNDER LOCK AND KEY	249
VII. THE TUNNEL GROWS	257
VIII. HUE AND CRY	264
IX. THE FIRST THROUGH THE TUNNEL	271
X. A GOD OF GLASS	278
XI. APOCALYPSE	287
XII. THE VOICE	297
XIII. PETER TRIUMPHANT	301
XIV. STRATEGY	308
XV. THE SALMON IS SPOILED	317

BOOK IV

THE PEACE

I. HOPE WAKES AND DIES	323
II. ON CHRISTMAS DAY	332
III. BURNHAM AS LEADER	338
IV. OUT OF NIGHT	346
V. THE LEOPARD CHANGES HER SPOTS	353
VI. THE BURNING OF BLAZEY	358
VII. DEATH AT THE GATE	364
VIII. BEARDING THE LION	372
IX. A SPECIAL LICENSE	381
X. EYES IN THE DARK	389
XI. FAREWELL, LOVEY LEE	396
XII. MANOR WOODS	407
XIII. THE PASSING OF JOHN	412
XIV. NEWS FROM VERMONT	419

PAGE

. 209
. 219
. 226
. 232
. 240
. 249
. 257
. 264
. 271
. 278
. 287
. 297
. 301
. 308
. 317

BOOK I

FOX TOR FARM

. 323
. 332
. 338
. 346
. 353
. 358
. 364
. 372
. 381
. 389
. 396
. 407
. 412
. 419



THE AMERICAN PRISONER

CHAPTER I

CATER'S BEAM

THE huge and solitary but featureless elevation of Cater's Beam on Dartmoor arrests few eyes. Seen from the central waste, one hog-backed ridge swells along the southern horizon, and its majestic outline, unfretted by tor or forest, describes the curve of a projectile discharged at gentle elevation. No detail relieves the solemn bulk of this hill, and upon it ages have left but little imprint of their passing. Time rolls over the mountain like a mist, and the mighty granite arch of the Beam emerges eternal and unchanged. Its tough integument of peat and heath and matted herbage answers only to the call of the seasons, and it bears grass, bloom, berry, as it bore them for palæolithic man and his flocks. Now, like a leopard, the Beam crouches black-spotted by the swaling fires of spring; now, in the late autumn time, its substance is coated with tawny foliage, scarlet-splashed under the low sun; now, dwarfed by snow, the great hill takes shape of an arctic bear. With spring the furzes flame again, and wonderful mosses—purple, gold, and emerald green—light the marshes or jewel the bank at every rill; and with summer the ling shines out, the asphodel burns in the bog, cloud-shadows drop their deep blue mantles upon the mountain's bosom, and the hot air dances mile on mile. Beneath Cater's Beam, and dwarfed thereby, arise the twin turrets of Fox Tor: while not far distant from these most lonely masses and pinnacles of granite shall be found the work of men's hands. Beside the desolate molasses and storm-scarred wastes that here

lie like a cup upon Dartmoor, a stone cross lifts its head, and ruins of a human habitation moulder back to the dust.

In nettles, stereobate deep, stands Fox Tor Farm, and the plant—sure and faithful follower of man—is significant upon this sequestered fastness: for hither it came with those who toiled to reclaim the region in time past, and no other nettles shall be found for miles. Other evidences of human activity appear around the perishing dwelling-house, where broken walls, decaying outbuildings, and tracts of cleared land publish their testimony to a struggle with the Moor. Great apparent age marks these remains, and the weathered and shattered entrances, the lichened drip-stones, the empty joist-holes, point to a respectable antiquity. Yet one hundred years ago this habitation did not exist. Its entire life—its erection and desertion, its prosperity and downfall—are crowded within the duration of a century. In 1800 no stone stood upon another; long ago the brief days of Fox Tor Farm were numbered, and already for fifty years it has written human hope, ambition, failure upon the wilderness.

One fragment of wrought granite remains, and the everlasting nettles beneath shall be found heraldically depicted upon a shattered doorway. There, where the ghost of a coat-of-arms may still be deciphered, Time gnaws at the badge of the Malherbs: Or, chev. gules inter three nettle-leaves vert.

Upon the summit of Cater's Beam, some ninety years ago, a member of that ancient and noble clan sat mounted, gazed into the far-spreading valley beneath him and saw that it was good and green. Thereupon he held his quest accomplished, and determined here to build himself a sure abode, that his cadet branch of the Malherb race might win foothold on the earth, and achieve as many generations of prosperity in the future as history recorded of his ancestors in the past. Seen a mile distant, sharp eyes upon that August day had marked a spot creep like a fly along the crest of Cater's Beam, crawl here and there, sink down to Fox Tor, and remain stationary upon its stony side for a full hour. Observed closely, one had watched a man at the crossroads of life—a man who struggled to mould his own fate and weave the skein of his days to his own pattern. Here he sat on a great bay horse and pursued the path of his future, as oblivious to its inevitable changes and chances as he was to a black cloud.

ridge that now lifted dark fringes against the northern sky and came frowning over the Moor against the course of the wind.

Maurice Malherb was close on fifty, and he had chosen to plough the earth for his partage in the world's work. A younger son of his house, he had turned from the junior's usual portion, and, by some accident of character, refused a commission and sought the peaceful occupations of agriculture. He had already wasted some portion of his patrimony upon land near Exeter; and he was seeking new outlet for his energies when arose a widespread ardour for cultivation of Dartmoor. The age of enterprise dawned there; "newtake" tenements sprang up like mushrooms upon this waste; and a region that had mostly slept since Elizabethan miners furrowed its breast and streamed its rivers for tin, awoke. As a grim crown to the Moor, Prince Town and its gigantic War Prison was created; while round about young woods budded, homesteads appeared, and wide tracts of the Royal Forest were rented to the speculative and the sanguine.

Maurice Malherb was among those first attracted by the prospect. A famous Dartmoor hero had influenced him in this decision, and he was now spending a week with Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, at Tor Royal, and examining the knight's operations in husbandry. He saw Dartmoor for the first time, and the frank, stern face of it challenged him. For three days he rode forth alone; and then he wandered to Cater's Beam and discovered the dewy cup where rivers rise beneath it. To the right and left he looked and smiled. His dark eyes drank up the possibilities of the land. Already he pictured dykes for draining of the marshes; already he saw crops ripening and slow oxen drawing the ploughshare in the valley. Of the eternal facts, hard as granite and stern as nature, that lurked here under the dancing summer air, he knew nothing. The man was fifteen hundred feet above the sea, in the playground of the west wind. The inveterate peat encompassed him—the hungry, limeless peat, that eats bone like a dog and fattens upon the life-blood of those who try to tame it. He gazed upon a wilderness where long winters bury the land in snow or freeze it to the granite core for months—save where warm springs twinkle in the mosses and shine like wet eyes out of a white face. Here the wise had observed and passed upon their way; but Maurice Malherb was not wise. August ruled the hour; the ling bloomed under the heat; a million

insects murmured and made a pleasant melody. Dartmoor for a moment smiled, and weary of the tame monotony of green meads, hedges elm-clad, and fields of ruddy earth, Malherb caught hope from this crystal air and enormous scene outspread, fell to picturing a notable future, and found his pulses leap to the great plans that thronged his mind.

He was of a square and sturdy habit of body. A clean-shorn countenance, deep-set black eyes beneath black brows, a large mouth underhung, and a nose very broad but finely moulded, were the distinguishing attributes of his face. Restlessness was alike the characteristic of his expression and of his nature. Generosity and pride dominated him in turn. His failures were the work of other people; his successes he claimed himself. His wife, his son, his daughter, the blood in his veins, the wine in his cellar, were all the best in the world. His demonian temper alone he deplored; yet in that, also, he found matter for occasional satisfaction; since, by a freak of atavism, he resembled at every physical and mental point an ancestor from the spacious times, whose deeds on deep and unknown seas had won him the admiration and friendship of Drake.

Malherb already saw a homestead spring upwards upon the green hill beneath Fox Tor. There would he lift his eyrie; there should successive generations look back and honour their founder; there—thunder broke suddenly upon his dreams and the bay horse shifted his fore-feet nervously beneath him. Whereupon he lifted his eyes, and found that a great storm was at hand. Unperceived it had crept out of the north while he stood wrapped in meditation; and now a ghastly glamour extended beneath it, for the Moor began to look like a sick thing, huddled here all bathed with weak yellow light from a fainting sun. Solitary blots and wisps of cloud darkened the sky and heralded the solid and purple van of the thunderstorm. All insect music ceased, and a hush, unbroken by one whisper, fell upon the hills. Cater's Beam suggested some prodigious, couchant creature, watchful yet fearless. Thus it awaited the familiar onset of the lightning, whose daggers had broken in its granite bosom a thousand times and left no scar.

The wanderer spurred his horse, and regained firm foothold on the crest of the land; then, bending to a torrent of rain, he galloped westward where the gaunt wards and barracks of Prince Town

towered above the desolation. But the tempest broke long before Malherb reached safety; darkness swallowed him and he struggled storm-foundered among the unfamiliar hills. Then fortune sent another traveller, and a young man, riding bare-backed upon a pony, came into view. Sudden lightning showed the youth, and, waiting for a tremendous volley of thunder that followed upon it, Malherb shouted aloud. His voice, though deep and sonorous, sounded thin as the pipe of a bird thus lifted immediately after the peal.

"Hold there! Where am I, boy? Which is the way to Tor Royal?"

"You be going right, sir," shouted the lad; "but 'tis a long road this weather. Best to follow me, if I may make so bold, an' I'll bring 'e to shelter in five minutes."

The offer was good, and Mr. Malherb accepted with a nod.

"Go as fast as you can; I'll keep behind you."

Both horses were moorland bred, for the visitor rode a stout hackney lent by his host. Yet Malherb had to shake up his steed to keep the native in sight. Presently the youth dismounted, and his companion became aware of a low cabin rising like a beehive before him. It stood at the foot of a gentle hill, within a rough enclosure of stone. Some few acres of land had been reclaimed about it, and not far distant, through the murk of the rain, its granite gleaming azure under the glare of the lightning, stood an ancient and famous stone.

"Now I know where I stand," said the stranger. "I came this way three hours since. There rises Siward's Cross—is it not so?"

"Ess, your worship, 'tis so. An' this 'ot do belong to my gran'mother. 'Tis a poor hole for quality, but stormtight. You please to go in that door an' I'll take your hoss after 'e. Us do all live under the same thatch—folks an' beastes."

The boy took both bridles, then kicked open the door of the hut, and shouted to his grandmother.

"Here's a gentleman almost drowned. Put on a handful of sticks an' make a blaze so as he can catch heat, for he be so wet as a frog!"

A loud, clear voice answered from the inner gloom.

"Sticks! Sticks! Be I made o' money to burn sticks at your bidding? If peat keeps the warmth in my carcase, 'twill do the like for him—king or tinker."

Maurice Malherb entered the cabin, then started back with an oath as an old woman rose and confronted him. She, too, exhibited the liveliest astonishment.

"Lovey Lee!"

"Ess fay, Lovey Lee it is," she answered slowly: "an' you'im Maurice Malherb or the living daps of him. To think! Ten years! An' all your curses haven't come home to roost neither by the looks of you."

"No," he replied. "They've hit the mark rather—or you are playing miser still and saving your crusts and tatters and living as you loved to live."

"I be an old, abused creature," she said. "I starve here wi' scarce a penny in the world, an' your faither's paltry legacy growing smaller day by day. I'll outlast it an' die wanting food, an' laugh at churchyard worms, since there'll be nought of me for 'em to breed in."

She rose and proclaimed herself a woman of extraordinary stature—a female colossus of bones. She stood six feet three inches, and, but for her wild and long grey hair, looked like a man masquerading.

Lovey Lee was a widow, and had spent most of her life in the service of the Malherbs. At twenty years of age she married a gamekeeper, and, twelve months later, her husband lost his life in a poaching affray. Then Lovey had returned to service. A posthumous girl was born to her, and the son of that daughter, now a lad of sixteen, dwelt with his grandmother upon the Moor. Mrs. Lee was clad in rags, and barely wore enough of them for decency. Her great gnarled feet were naked; her huge hands protruded from tattered sleeves; and the round ulnar condyles at her wrists were as big as pigeon's eggs. Lean, wiry, and as hard as adamant, the miser lived in this fastness with her cattle and her daughter's son. Mystery shrouded her doings in the past. She seldom spoke, and seldom appeared among the moorland haunts of men. Therefore humble folks feared her for a witch, and avoided her by day or night. In reality, the passion of her life and the mainspring of every action was greed; and she exceeded the vulgar miser in this—that intrinsic worth, not alone the rude glitter of money, commanded her worship. Value was the criterion; she rose superior to the chink of gold; she loved a diamond as well as the coins that represented it; or a piece of

CATER'S BEAM

9

land, or a milch cow. Her education in the house of the Malherbs lifted her to some breadth of mind; and when the head of the family had passed away, ten years before the beginning of these events, a black cloud hung over this woman's behaviour, and turned her old master's children against her.

Now the man of all others most involved by this dame's doubtful conduct stood before her eyes and asked an abrupt question.

"What did you do with the Malherb amphora, Lovey Lee?"

CHAPTER II

THE MALHERB AMPHORA

UPON the death of Sir Nicholas Malherb, his second son, Maurice, found himself in possession of fifteen thousand pounds and the famous Malherb amphora, an heirloom of the family. By arrangement with the elder brother, Maurice took the amphora instead of its equivalent in cash, and thus the succeeding baronet was richer by twenty thousand pounds, which more fully answered his purposes than the ancient treasure.

Concerning this gem a word must be spoken. While slightly inferior to the Portland vase in size, its workmanship equalled that of the more famous curio, and it was esteemed by connoisseurs as much superior to the Auldjo vase, or another marvellous example of similar cameo glass, still the acquisition of Naples. In Maurice Malherb's amphora, a bygone vitrarius had immortalised his art. The opaque bubble of white glass was coated with cerulean blue, and upon this surface another film of white had been spread. With the gem engraver's tools these strata were sculptured into a most exquisite design of little Loves playing hide and seek amid the foliage of the acanthus. Herein genius had accomplished a masterpiece, and all men capable of appreciating it wished Maurice Malherb joy of the treasure. To desire the amphora in place of its value was characteristic of his fine taste and spirit, and also symbolic of his wayward disposition, since money had been of far greater service to him in his agricultural pursuits. Then a catastrophe overtook Malherb, for within a week of his father's death, the amphora disappeared. The bubble of glass vanished like a bubble of water. Upon the morning of a certain day Maurice had moved it from its place in a locked cabinet, displayed it to relations and put it back again; but, returning to this

THE MALHERB AMPHORA

11

receptacle within two hours, he found the amphora was no longer there. All that man could do men did to recover the treasure; but not one sign of the amphora nor one shadowy clue as to its situation rewarded expert search. Then that nine days' wonder waned, and only the sufferer still smarted under his loss. He called upon his brother to make good this grave decrement of fortune, but the heir refused to do so, and a breach in the family widened from that hour.

Maurice Malherb alone of all those interested in this theft had suspected the old servant, Lovey Lee; yet knowledge of her character and peculiar propensities led him most stoutly to believe that she was the thief of the amphora. His father had trusted and honoured this gaunt creature. He had admired her remarkable physical courage, thrift, and common sense; and while Mrs. Lee always annoyed and disgusted the family, Sir Nicholas himself professed open respect for her, and found her secretly useful in ways not published to the world. Yet, upon his death, Lovey declared herself beyond measure shocked and disappointed at a legacy of one thousand pounds which the knight bequeathed to her. She fumed and fretted, spoke of unknown services, and loudly cried that the dead had inflicted upon her a cruel wrong.

Presently she vanished unregretted from the home of the Malherbs; and after her departure Maurice began to associate the old servant with his loss. The woman was traced and surprised. She posed as one deeply injured, and proved to demonstration that she knew nothing of the amphora. Yet its owner was not convinced, and within a year he himself sought out Lovey Lee in hope to make a bargain with her and recover his property by paying a generous sum and promising to take no step against her. She had, however, forfeited her life if guilty, for men and women hanged on light accusations a century ago. But Malherb never found the opportunity he desired, because Mrs. Lee had quite disappeared when he made search for her. During ten years he heard nothing of her fate; then chance threw him into the old woman's company again under this fury of a Dartmoor storm; and his first thought was the lost treasure.

In answer to the straight question, Lovey revealed both power of words and subtlety of mind. Her eyes glittered; each

wrinkle in her face gathered itself together, as though to repulse an enemy; her sharp nose looked eager to stab him. She showed her teeth, and Malherb noted that they were white and strong.

"Still harping on that gimcrack; still babbling to the world that 'twas I stole it! What a fool must you be—an' not the first Malherb as was that—to think I've got your fortune. Look around you. Put your nose in that cupboard. You'll find barley bread an' rancid grease—not the Malherb amphora. Do 'e see thicky wall? 'Tis piled o' peat, an' I live 'pon one side an' my donkey an' pony an' cows 'pon t'other. They save fuel in winter; they keep the air warm with their breath. I often go an' sleep with 'em when 'tis too cold to bear my bones. But they say that your glass toy was worth twenty thousand pounds. Even a thief might have got rid of it for thousands. An' should I be here—should I make a jackass my pillow, an' live on berries and acorns like a bird, an' stew snails to my broth, if I'd gotten thousands? One dirty thousand I did have—may your faither roast for his mean trick—an' this here slack-limbed great boy, Jack Lee, to keep with it. But——"

"Hear me!" interrupted Malherb. "What you say would be true enough if it was not Lovey Lee who spoke. D'you think I don't remember you and your ways—you that sold your good food and lived on orts; that bartered your clothes and hated wearing any raiment that was better than a scarecrow's? Possession of my vase would be the light of your life. Not because it is lovely; not because the genius of man never devised nor his hand fashioned a nobler thing in such sort; but because it is worth twenty thousand pounds, and because to be able to hug that wealth all at once to your evil heart would be paradise to you. That is why I believed you were the thief; and still believe it."

She snarled at him, then made a slow answer.

"Believe as you please. I'll be very happy to hang for it—when you find it. An' ban't no joy to me to see you under my roof, for you hate me an' think evil against me, though I served your parents so faithful as the humble can serve the great, an' nursed your youngest brother at my own breast."

"'Twas chance, not intention, led me," he answered. "A few years ago I longed to meet you, and make you an offer. Now the opportunity has come. I'll be reasonable, as I always am."

You cannot take the amphora with you when you die. At least see that my son——"

"Go your ways an' trouble me no more!" she cried, and Malherb flashed into a passion.

"As to that, if this hole is your home, I'm like to trouble you not a little, you cross-grained hag. See there—where the heart of the storm is bursting now, at the other side of this great marsh—there you'll presently find a granite house lifting itself four-square to the winds. I also have chosen the Moor for a home. May that knowledge bring you to better wisdom."

The old woman was deeply interested by this intelligence.

"What! You be coming? Then you haven't flourished down country after all, but must climb up here an' begin again. You're mad! An' 'tis a wicked thing to steal the Moor acre by acre as you an' the likes of you be doing now. An' Duchy always ready with its cursed greedy paws stretched out to take your money."

"I shall be a Moor-man, too, and enjoy rights of Venville," he said, more to himself than to the woman.

"'Tis a wicked thing and flat robbery," she repeated. "All the countryside be raw under it; but for what count the rights of the poor? All the best of the Moor—all the best strolls for grazing, where the grass be greenest—all the lew spots—all stolen away one after t'other an' barred against the lawful commoners; an' not a hand lifted. That hill be where my cows do graze an' roam. Now you'll drive 'em from their proper lairs, an' they'll have to bide on the coarse grass, an' I'll be stinted of milk, as is my poor livelihood."

"You'll still have enough to fill the amphora," said Maurice Malherb; then he turned to the boy.

"Bring you my horse, lad. The storm is past. I can get on to Tor Royal now."

"An' tell Tyrwhitt what I tell you," said Lovey, "that him an' the rest be no better'n a pack of thieves an' cadgers. 'Tis a hanging matter if us steals the goose from the common; but nobody says nought when the upper people steal the common from the goose. There'll come a day of reckoning for Duchy yet—an' Tyrwhitt too!"

She stood and watched him mount, with her bent head thrust out of the door, like a gigantic fowl looking out of a pen.

Malherb made no answer, but turned to the boy.

"There's a crown for you, youngster, and I wish you a better grandmother."

He went his way and the old woman twitched her long nose and stared after him.

"Born fool—born fool—to waste what he've got left on this here wilderness. An' so awful nigh to my——" She broke off and turned to the boy, John.

"What did he give e', Jack? Quick! Out with it!"

As a matter of custom the youth gave up his money.

"A crown! Just the same great silly gawk he always was. Never knowed anybody with such large notions touching money. But them notions breed thin purses."

"A very fine gentleman all the same, granny, an' a rides butiful, an' have a flashing eye, an' a voice as makes you run to do his bidding. He'm awful proud, but I like him."

"'Like him!' You ungrateful little toad, you ought to cuss him for speaking so wicked to your grandam."

"There was laughter in his eyes more'n once."

"Go an' pick snails; go pick snails! They'll swarm after the rain. I see the ducks gulching 'em by the quart. My snail-barrel be running low."

She watched young John start to obey, then spoke to herself.

"'Likes him!' Maybe he does. Blood's thicker'n water."

CHAPTER III

BESIDE EXE

SIR THOMAS TYRWHITT loudly applauded the decision to which his guest had come, for it was the knight's conviction that Dartmoor's high places offered health, work, and reward to all men. Himself a friend of the Prince Regent, he commanded attention from other personages also, and his own estates by the new settlement of Prince Town grew rapidly; his own enterprises awoke a sanguine spirit in others.

Three days after the thunderstorm, Mr. Malherb sat with the High Bailiff of Dartmoor at the Duchy of Cornwall office; and, such was his impetuous energy, that within two months the walls of Fox Tor Farm began to rise. From Lew Trenchard came the slates (a circumstance that set men wondering, for reed thatch covered most heads upon the Moor in those days): and teams of a dozen oxen struggled over the waste, dragging sledges laden with stone. Roads there were none, and no wheeled vehicle had ever entered that wild valley. Malherb took up his temporary residence at an ancient tenement farm within five miles of his land, and daily he rode to the scene of action, planned and plotted, ordered and countermanded, now entered upon passing periods of doubt, now threw aside his dilemmas and turned to problems more easy of solution.

In the placid homestead beside Exe awoke stir and bustle too, for the farm on the Moor was now progressing rapidly, and Annabel Malherb and her daughter Grace had learnt that their new dwelling was to be ready within a year—a time quite short in those leisurely days for the transference of a home. Mother and daughter contemplated the great change brooding over their existence, with lively hopes and fears. The enterprise loomed

tremendous to their simple minds ; but both trusted the master in their hearts, if at times their heads whispered treachery.

The wife was of an ancient pattern, and set high religious significance on marriage vows ; the child loved her stormy father, and bravely stood for him in the face of a critical and unsympathetic world. To Malherb's faults these women blinded themselves ; his virtues they sang at all seasons. From Carew stock the matron sprang, and her noble blood, her steadfastness of view, her large trust in the goodness of Divine purpose, was all her dowry, for wealth she had none. Grace Malherb resembled her mother in mind and bearing. She was a simple, generous-hearted maiden, and her life had passed without storm or stress. She moved in the scented Devon lanes ; she gathered the eglantine and wild roses in spring, at autumn plucked the scarlet corals of the iris or those glimmering green mosses that made fair vestment for the red earth. But now her eyes were lifted to Dartmoor, where its hills rose shadowy across the western sky ; and awe and wonder widened the limits of her mind, and mystery awoke in dreams and added beauty to her face.

The imperious farmer had a whim to keep his wife and daughter away from their future home until it should be ready to receive them ; and since they were wholly ignorant of the great tableland, the contrast between Fox Tor with its adjacencies and the meadow farm by Exe was destined to come upon both women with a force almost bewildering. Even to the thin voices of the labouring men, their chastened outlook upon life and their estimate of happiness, all was changed.

The attitude of Annabel and Grace Malherb upon this radical transformation will appear. From agricultural failure and depression in the valleys they were at least well contented to escape.

On an autumn day they walked and talked together upon a meadow path by the river. Maurice Malherb was returning from the Moor for a while to look after his business, and here his wife and daughter waited for him.

"That your father has built a house is well," declared Mrs. Malherb, "for, come what may to his many projects, an abiding place of our own will be a source of peace to me."

"And no more coal bills!" cried Grace. "Father has said that we shall dig our coal out of the earth within sight of home."

"'Tis peat he means—a very good form of warmth—yet I doubt for the cooking."

"Barbara would have made shift with it. Oh, mother, what shall we do without her?"

"I cannot guess yet."

"To think of all new servants—all new—but that horrid old Kek!"

Mrs. Malherb smiled.

"Kekewich is a sort of skeleton at life's feast. The sour truth and nothing but the truth he utters. Yet truth's a tonic, and your father knows it."

"Truth is often very impertinent—especially as Kek tells it. If any other man spoke to father as he does, he would soon be measuring his length on the ground."

"It shows my husband's marvellous judgment that Kekewich never angers him."

"To me the man is merely a piece of earth animated. Such stuff would never have grown a good cabbage, so some wicked fairy took it and made Kek. I'm sure he'll be a wet blanket on hope, and, according to father, the mists are wet blankets enough up there."

"Kekewich suffers much pain of body, and it makes him harsh. He is an honest man, and your father gets good out of him. That is enough for us. He is at least the soul of common sense."

But Grace shook her head.

"'Tis no more common sense to look always on the dark side of things than, like dear father, to be over-hopeful."

"The golden mean——" murmured her mother.

"Rainbow gold," answered the girl. "Human nature cannot find it. What——? But here comes Kek himself. He looks spry and peart for once. That bodes trouble for somebody."

A gate opened upon the path, and in the red-gold light of evening a man approached them. The ruddy earth had dyed his garments to its rich hue, had soaked into his clothes and body. He seemed incarnate clay. His frame had crooked, his hair was grizzled. His mouth was like the stamp of a gouge upon putty, and at first glance a grin appeared to sit upon his face; but, better seen, one noted that the distortion was accidental, and that in reality his features were stamped with the eternal sadness of suffering.

"Three barrow pigs be just drowned," he said. "I seed 'em fighting in the water: then they went down an' comed up again, an' squeaked proper till the river chucked 'em. 'Tis always what I said would happen."

"Where was Bob?" asked Grace, with much concern. "The blame will fall upon him."

"So it will, but that won't bring the pigs alive again; though they'll do very well for common people to eat if we can get 'em ashore inside twenty-four hours."

The sound of a horse's hoofs broke upon the silence that followed this bad news. Then Maurice Malherb appeared, dismounted, kissed his wife and daughter, and nodded to the servant.

"All goes forward most prosperously," he said. "Since I promised the foreman ten pounds if the chimney-pots were on by Christmas, the place grows like honeycomb in June."

"Why, 'twas to be finished by then in any case, according to contract, my dear!"

"True; but you know what these people are."

"You be one as would pay for honesty an' make it marketable. 'Tis a wrong way, an' don't do the world no good," grumbled Kekewich.

"We must oil the wheels of progress, Kek," said his master. "I want to begin. I want to fight next winter up there."

"Best way to fight Dartmoor winters be to flee from 'em," answered the old man.

"Nay, nay—that's a coward's policy. I'm going to do things on Dartmoor that never have been done yet. I've not farmed here all these years for nothing."

"No, by Gor! you've not."

Annabel Malherb and Grace now turned homeward, and the farmer walked slowly beside Kekewich.

"Up aloft they make a great many mistakes. I mean the folk of the Moor. But to see error is to avoid it with a man of sense. And I've let the people find out already that they will have a powerful friend in me. I learn from them what to do, as well as what not to do. We shall want all kinds to help us. I believe in a big staff on a farm—especially a grazing farm. The old, the strong, the young—light work for the men that are three score and ten, and worn with a life of labour, though useful yet. And none shall have tail corn, as too often happens up there,

for who can do man's work on pig's food? And my cider shall be cider, as it always has been—not the vinegar they call cider on Dartmoor."

"Ess—you'll make the place a hospital for them past work—same as this be."

"Not I. But I'll keep self-respect in my people. The women shall have sixpence a day out of doors. The labourer is worthy of her hire."

"You'll never learn sense. You comed in the world to waste money, not to make it, as I've always told 'e. Sixpence a day for females! What next?"

"'Cast thy bread on the waters.' I'm a working Christian, and a lesson to you, heathen that you are."

"A working Christian ban't no better for being a fool. What's the sense of casting your bread 'pon the water while your wife an' maiden be hungry upon the shore?"

"Hungry! You're mad!"

"Twill come to hunger. You'd spoil any market—a very good, open-hearted gentleman, us all knows; but sixpence a day for outdoor females! 'Tis all summed up in that. There ban't a outdoor woman in the world worth more'n fourpence."

"Ask their husbands. You're an old bachelor."

"Ess—thank God!"

"Some sloes there are that even winter will never sweeten: and you are such a one. How fares the rheumatism?"

"A sleeping dog for the minute. He was gnawing his bone proper last week though. Maybe Dartmoor will lessen my pangs."

"I hope so with all my heart. 'Tis the least it can do for you, seeing how much you are going to do for it. Such men as you are greatly wanted there."

"Such men as me take blamed good care to bide down in the country—unless they've got reckless masters," said Kekewich.

Then he took 'F'alherb's horse and departed, while anon the farmer discoursed very learnedly to his wife concerning Dartmoor. But his knowledge was borrowed; his enthusiasm was no substitute for personal experience. Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt loved the Moor like a mistress. To her faults he was blind; and he had now inspired his friend with kindred ardour.

"I long to begin looking for men, but 'tis too soon yet,"

Malherb declared. "In a few months, however, I shall have work for half a dozen."

"And a dairymaid, remember, since you design a complete change, and will not keep our Annie," said Mrs. Malherb.

"Yes, the women understand calves and cows wonderfully well up there. Such sheds as I am building—like the cloisters of a cathedral! But stock on Dartmoor in winter needs snug houses and generous treatment."

The women caught his mood, and prattled as though they already saw prosperity beckoning out of the future.

"After the war 'twill all go well, I pray," said Mrs. Malherb. "All human affairs languish just now; but when the war is ended and Noel comes home—— Peter Norcot, from the Woollen Factory at Chagford, was here in doleful dumps yesterday. The East Indian Company, who is their first customer——"

"Did you see him, Grace?" interrupted Maurice.

The girl blushed and shook her head, whereupon her father's face grew dark.

"For another year you shall have your way, Miss. Then—— I have said it. Then comes the pinch, and somebody will have to learn the duty of a child to its parent."

"I'll not marry with Peter—never," she said quietly. "He's no man—a mere walking, talking chatterbox—a packman, with nonsensical rags and tags of rhymes and jests for his stock-in-trade. He would drive me mad with his borrowed wit."

"We shall see," said Malherb. "His wit may be borrowed; his wealth is his own. Now go you and get a bottle of the Burgundy. We'll not argue—we love one another too dearly."

But though he spoke calmly, his mood changed, and the infernal temper that cursed his life, and lurked in his warm, big heart like a wasp in a rose, broke forth. He heard the dismal tale of the drowned pigs, dashed out of doors with his horsewhip, and roared for the lad Robert. When Grace returned with his wine, her father had disappeared; her mother, grown white and careworn suddenly, stood by the window.

Shrieks echoed through the autumn gloaming and rang against the walls of the farm; while, round a corner, the unfortunate youth whose errors were responsible for his master's loss lifted up a bitter voice and yelled for mercy under the lash.

"That'll teach you, you idle scoundrel! If you'd been drowned,

none would have cared a curse. But my pigs—there, and there, and there; and never show your ugly face to me again, or I'll——"

Bob fled howling, and through a night of smart and sleeplessness wriggled in much misery. But only the present suffering of his back troubled him, for he knew what day would bring as surely as it brought the sun.

He met his master going the rounds before breakfast, and touched his hat and fell into a great simulated lameness; whereon Malherb gave him "Good morning" and threw him a shilling.

"Mind the pigs closer henceforth, you vagabond," he said; then added to himself as he saw the boy's rueful countenance, "and I will mind my temper closer, please God."

Kekewich appeared from a barn as the shilling was picked up.

"Ah," he said, when Bob had departed, "usual way. Even the misfortune of they pigs have cost 'e a coin more'n there was any call to pay."

CHAPTER IV

"THE MARROW OF THE FARM"

THE grievance uttered by Lovey Lee against those who settled upon Dartmoor and appropriated to particular uses that ancient domain, was widespread a hundred years ago, and is alive to-day. Aforetime some five-and-thirty ancient Forest Tenements were held as customary freeholds, or copyholds, from the Manor of Lydford independent of the Duchy, and these venerable homesteads shall be found scattered in the most secluded and salubrious regions of the Moor. Of these, however, the Duchy has now secured more than half, and it will probably acquire the remainder in process of time. But a different sort of farm sprang up on every side a century since: "newtake" tenements appeared: and Maurice Malherb now proposed to erect another such in the virgin valley of Fox Tor. These constant enclosures have been a source of discontent upon Dartmoor for many generations, and the peasants protest with reason, for theirs is the unalienable right to this great waste, and every acre fenced off against their sheep and cattle is a defiance of ancient charters and a robbery of the poor. The cry was old before Tudor times, and you shall read in *Henry VII.* (Part 2) how the Second Peter, representing his fellow-townsmen, petitions "against the Duke of Suffolk, for enclosing the commons of Melford."

And so it happened that Malherb's advent made him more enemies than friends in the border villages and among the scattered homesteads of the Moor.

A little knot of grumblers were met together at the "Saracen's Head," near Prince Town—a modest tavern long since superseded by the present famous hostelry at Two Bridges. This party now

ared its wrongs, and albeit no man amongst them had ever set eyes upon Malherb, all spoke an evil word against him, and each man could report some sinister story gleaned from another. It appeared certain upon these rumours that the new "squatter" was a hard and rapacious rascal.

"The place will be finished home to the roof next year," said a thin, straight man with a long beard and a face so hidden in hair that little more than his nose and eyes protruded from it. "Fox Tor Farm 'twill be named, an' Lovey Lee, up to Siward's Cross, have said as she'll bewitch him from the day he enters the house."

"Somebody did ought to tell the Prince Regent," murmured a very old man who sat by the fire. "He don't know about these here goings on, an' how Duchy fills his pockets with gold stolen from our pockets. This place was given to us in the early ages of the earth, an' if the Prince knowed the rights of it, he wouldn't take the money."

"What be Duchy, Uncle Smallridge?" inquired a weak-eyed youth with flaxen hair and fluffy, corn-coloured down about his cheeks and chin. "For my part I can't grasp hold of it. Be it a live thing as you might say?"

The old man addressed as Uncle Smallridge laughed and spat into the fire.

"Duchy's alive enough; yet 'tis wasting wind to cuss it an' breath to talk against it. 'Tis alive, but it can't be hurted; it have ears, but it be deaf to the likes of us. It laughs at us, but we never hear the laughter."

"An' it's got a deep pocket," said the hairy man. "What say you, neighbour Woodman?"

"I say, 'tis a monster," answered another speaker. "'Tis the invention of the Devil to breed anger an' evil thoughts in us. Here be I, Harvey Woodman of Huccaby, son of Harvey Woodman of Huccaby, grandson of Harvey Woodman of Huccaby, great-grandson of Harvey Woodman of Huccaby; an' I tell you that the vexations of the Duchy have so lighted 'pon my family from generation to generation, that it has got in our blood an' we stand to it same as mankind in the Bible do stand to the seed of the serpent."

"Maybe—with a difference, Harvey," answered Uncle Smallridge. "Duchy'll bruise your head for you, an' your son's head,

same as it did your forbears, but you won't bruise its heel; for why? It haven't got no heel to bruise."

"'Tis a wicked whole made up of decent bits," declared the hairy man, whose name was Richard Beer. "The gents as stand for Duchy, take 'em one by one, be human men same as us; but when they meets together, the Devil's in the chair every time. An' now another two hundred acres gone, an' all that butivul stroll for cattle beyond Fox Tor Mire walled off against my heifers an' yours."

"I hate the chap afore I see him. He've got a wicked-sounding name," said Thomas Putt, the youth with weak eyes.

"If we was men instead of mice, we'd rise up an' show Duchy that right's right, and that its ways be the ways of a knave," said Harvey Woodman. Then he shook his bull neck and drank deep.

"Supposing us all had your great courage, no doubt something would be done," answered Beer. "What you say be true; but we spend our indignation in words an' leave none for deeds."

"Where there's smoke there's fire," declared the ancient by the hearth. "If I was a younger man I'd lead you forth against Duchy an' be the fust to heave down they walls rising up-along—ay, an' call upon the God o' Justice to lend His Almighty Hand."

"Which He wouldn't do; for there ban't no miracles now, Uncle Smallridge," said Thomas Putt.

"Ban't there? I think there be, else you'd be shut up, Tom, an' not roaming free."

This allusion made the company laugh, for, despite his slim shape and peering eyes, Tom Putt was a daring poacher—one of Isaac Walton's wicked but most skilful disciples. He killed many a salmon, and he shot many a partridge intended for a nobler destiny than slaughter at his hand.

A stranger entered the bar of the "Saracen's Head" at this moment. The man shook the wet from his coat, went to the fire, and ordered a glass of hot brandy and water.

"Nice plum weather still, your honour," said Uncle Smallridge, as he made his way from the blaze. "The sun have been drawing up the autumn rains these many days, but winter's here at last. The water will all come home again in snow."

"Wet enough," said the other. "I marvel your grass here doesn't rot in the ground."

"An' so it do in some places," answered Richard Beer; "as if it wasn't hard enough to get a living for the dumb things without walling the Moor off against the rightful owners. Come presently there won't be a bit of sweet grazing us can call our own. Now here's this Mr. Malherb—a foreigner from down Exeter way—bitten off a few more hundred acres of the best."

"Who says any ill of him?" asked the stranger.

"'Tis only hearsay," declared Woodman. "There may be good in him; but I wish he'd bided away."

"Lord knows I wouldn't speak no malice against the gentleman," continued Beer, "for I am going to ax him to give me work. He wants a few understanding chaps, 'tis said. An' I know the Moor better'n my Bible, more shame to me. You'll bear me out, neighbours, that I can get what man may from Dartmoor soil?"

"You'm very witty at it, us all knows," admitted Harvey Woodman.

"How would you tackle those wet slopes under Fox Tor?" asked the new-comer.

"Well," answered Beer, "drain, drain, drain an' graze, graze, graze; an' leave 'he natural herbage as much as you may. You won't better it."

The stranger laughed.

"If Maurice Malherb can't improve upon Nature on Dartmoor, 'tis pity," he declared.

But Richard Beer shook his head.

"You've got to follow in these parts, not lead. Nature do know her own business; an' you can't teach her, for her won't larn. Farming be a sort of coaxing her to your way o' thinking. There's two sorts o' stuff the place be made of: peaty moor, as'll yield good grass; an' swamp, as be useful to nought but a frog. This here Mr. Malherb must drain, an' pare, an' burn in reason; but he must not overdo it."

"Mind you, the natural things have their value," put in old Smallridge. "French furze at four years' growth do fetch a pound an acre. An' if the land be fatted properly the man might grow potatoes."

"Potatoe do eat up all afore you eat them," said Beer; "though the appleing of 'em do keep the earth sweet an' mellow. Then he'll follow with barley, not wheat."

"As to the chances of corn?" asked the stranger. His wet coat smoked and sent up a fire-lit steam in the darkening chamber.

"Corn's a ticklish business, master," replied Beer. "It 'tis to be done if you'll bring your soil to a husband-like tilth an' not spare lime. Burn clean, plough, an' dress as generously as your pocket will stand. Then spread fresh mould afore the seed earth. Earth must be fetched, for you've got to remember there's none there. Then sow your wheat—ten pecks to the acre—harrow in, strike out the furrows, and pray God for eighteen bushels to the acre. He can do it an' He's a minded. Next year the man must refresh his stubble, plough, sow, hack in, an' hope for ten or twelve bushels. Then turnips must follow—not broadcast like our fathers sowed 'em—for that's to spread a table for the fly, but the two-furrow way. Then the land must have three years' fallow; an' that's the whole law an' the prophets about it, so far as I know anything."

"In my youth," said Uncle Smallridge, "when the world was awful backward at farming, us growed nought but rye; an' a fool here an' there do still cling to his fathers' coat-tails an' go on growing it. But not one in the forefront of the day, like Dick Beer."

"All the same," concluded Mr. Beer, "the gentleman's best stand-by will be beasts, like the rest of us. It don't pay trying to tame Dartmoor—he'll soon find that out, despite all the talk of Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt an' such-like great men."

"And you want work?" asked the listener.

"So I do. I'm ready to try an' make a fortune for anybody."

"Why are you out of employment?"

"My last master have gived up," confessed the labourer.

"Did you make his fortune?"

"To be plain, he was very unlucky. I couldn't help him. Nobody couldn't. He was overlooked, I reckon. The evil eye was upon him."

"Ah!—Well, Maurice Malherb is not frightened of the evil eye. What wages do you get?"

"Nought to trumpet about. Seven shilling a week—'tis the usual wage, but pinching. My wife be good for two shilling. So us do very well—thanks to God, who didn't send no childer."

"I'll give you ten shillings a week."

"You! Who be you, master?"

"I am Maurice Malherb, of Fox Tor Farm. Work must begin in a month. I'm looking round me. My head man comes up presently. But he doesn't know Dartmoor. You appear to do so. Provided your credentials and character are good, I'll engage you on trial."

"Aw jimmery! this be great news. Ten shilling a week!"

"My workpeople will be the marrow of my farm. I know that very well."

"You'd do wise to take his wife along with him, your honour," said Uncle Smallridge. "Such a dairymaid ban't often met with. Fifteen cows she've been known to tackle with no more than help in the milking. That's three more'n any other woman I've ever heard about."

"'Tis true, your honour," declared Richard Beer; "though my own wife, 'tis true. There be some as would rob the hearse an' chase the driver—such be always crying out for help in their work; but my Dinah's different. A towser for work; an' her temper pretty near so sweet as the cream she makes."

"She shall come," answered Mr. Malherb. "My lady has the usual pin-money," he continued. "The poultry, pigs, and dairy produce accrue to her; and out of it she keeps the house, save in bread and green stuff. She will need a good dairymaid who can go to market."

"An' if there's any more men you want, Woodman here be a masterpiece at ploughing an' wall-building an' handling stone in general, ban't you, Harvey?" asked Mr. Beer, solicitous for his friend.

"Yes, I be," said Mr. Woodman. "Us was somebody in the land once, but now I've only got a little old cottage left at Huccaby, though in the past my people owned the farm there an' scores an' scores of acres. But us have gone down. I'll come if you want me; an' my son be a very handy lad. I live by cutting peat an' building walls an' such like; but 'tis a poor business, an' I'd gladly go over to you, master, if you'll give me a trial."

"An' do, please your honour, find me a job," cried Thomas Putt. "I wouldn't be so bold an' 'dashus as to ax for a shilling a day; but, afore God, I'll do great deeds for ninepence!"

"An' what great deeds can you do?" asked Malherb. "You should go to a physician for your eyes."

"They be only pink-rimmed, your worsh.,," explained the owner. "They'm dia...ls for see'ng with—specially by night."

"Putt be a very...man if he's got a better to watch him, ban't you, Thomas," asked Mr. Beer, and the poacher admitted it.

"'Tis so," he confessed frankly. "I can't stand to work if I know there ban't no eye upon me. 'Tis my nature."

"Not but what you've got your vartues," added Beer kindly.

"An' come his honour wants a salmon, or a woodcock, or a fat hare, he can't do better than go to you for it."

Mr. Malherb enjoyed this subject.

"I'm a sportsman myself, my lads. I love every bit of sport—gun, horse, hound, and rod. You shall have your chance, Tom; but no poaching, mind, or it's all up with you. Now I shall want but two more men and one more woman and my household will be complete."

As he spoke a figure crawled out from a corner. No word had he spoken either before or since Malherb's arrival, but now this singular man approached, pulled his hair, and addressed the new power. He looked almost a dwarf, but his head was of normal size, and his expression betokened character. The labourer had seen sixty years. He was quite bald and as wrinkled as an old russet apple. His costume differed much from that of the company, for it seemed that he was chiefly clad in the pelts of v'rmin. A martin's skin furnished his cap, and at its side glimmered the sky-blue wing-feathers of a jay; his coat was green corduroy, but his waistcoat was made of moleskins, and he had a white one on each side for the pocket-lappet.

"I be Leaman Cloberry, coney-catcher an' mole-catcher," he said. "No man can teel a trap like me."

"I shan't want a coney-catcher," declared Malherb.

"Not regular, not regular; but off an' on, when the varmints get too free. There's other things, too. There's grays—or badgers, as you'd call 'em; there's pole-cats, an' martin-cats, an' hawks, an' owls, not to name foxes."

"Foxes?" said Malherb, frowning.

"Plenty of 'em; an' I gets six-an'-eightpence for a fox. You'll always find 'em hanging up on the yew tree in the churchyard, so that all the parish on its way to worship 'pon Sundays may see I earn my money."

"Kill foxes?"

"All varmint, your honour—from a hoop* to a hedge-pig."

"The man who kills foxes will never earn a shilling from me," thundered Malherb. "Out of my sight, you old miscreant! Kill foxes! What is Tyrwhitt about? I'd hang you to the church yew yourself if I had my way. Honest foxes to be killed by a clown!"

Leaman Cloberry regarded the angry settler without flinching.

"If you're that sort, your people be likely to have uneasy dreams," he said. "As to foxes, there'll be plenty for you an' the likes of you to run after on horseback—no need to fear that. I've killed but ten dogs an' two vixens in cub this year. I lay you'll meet more foxes around your hen-roosts up-along than you'll find time to hunt. Then you'll be sorry you growed so fiery against me."

"Get you gone, you mouldy rascal! Go to your vermin and foul the air no more."

The mole-catcher smiled and put on his hat.

"I'll go," he said, "since you be too great a man to breathe alongside of me. Good evening to your honour; an' my duty to you."

Then he made his exit, singing:

"A ha'penny for a rook;
A penny for a jay;
A noble for a fox;
An' twelvecence for a gray!"

It was the tariff of his trade, and he sang the words aloud at all seasons and in all company.

Nobody spoke after Malherb's explosion; but a moment afterwards he grew calm again, finished his liquor, and prepared to depart.

"Come with your papers on Monday week to Tor Royal. And now drink success to Fox Tor Farm, and when next you hear of Maurice Malherb, remember that the devil is not so black as he is painted."

He flung half a crown upon the counter and went his way, while the men in eager concert cried, "So us will, your honour!" "Long life an' fortune to your honour!" and "Good luck to Fox Tor Farm!"

* Hoop: A bullfinch.

When Malherb was gone they discussed the matter, and no emotion but a very active interest marked their attitude.

"Dartymoor'll soon larn him not to fling half-crowns about," said Uncle Smalldridge.

"Ten shilling a week!" mused Richard Beer. "He must be made of money."

"More likely soft in his head," answered a woman behind the bar.

CHAPTER V

DAWN

WITH the following spring Fox Tor Farm was habitable, and Mrs. Malherb and her daughter prepared to enter their new home. They had spent the winter in Exeter, for the old farm by Exe passed into other hands at Christmas, but Mr. Malherb himself already lived upon the Moor. In February he had gone into residence with Kekewich, and though the place was still but partially completed, his labourers also began work upon the scene and made shift to dwell there. Good apartments for the people were now finished, and Mr. Malherb's cattle had also arrived to fill the fine yard and comfortable byres erected for their winter uses. Kekewich cried failure from the first, but none laboured more zealously to avert it, none toiled early and late with more strenuous diligence than he.

True to his whim, the master denied Annabel Malherb and Grace one sight of Fox Tor Farm until they actually arrived to dwell there; and even then he so ordered their advent that it fell in darkness. At ten o'clock upon a night in mid-April, mother and daughter passed over the nocturnal Moor, vaguely felt its surrounding immensity, and turned from the unknown earth, where it rolled formless and vast around them, to the familiar moon, whose face they knew.

From Holne, a border village whither they had driven by stage, Mrs. Malherb and her daughter now rode on pillions; while behind them came the tinkle of little bells and the thud of heavy hoofs where six pack-horses followed. Annabel sat behind her husband; while Grace had Harvey Woodman for her escort. Through the silent darkness they passed, and the mother listened to Malherb's hopes, and sometimes kissed the round ear next her while she

echoed his sanguine mind. But Grace paid little heed to Woodman, who discoursed without tact upon the complicated miseries of a Dartmoor life, and explained how that his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, had all gone steadily downhill before the insidious Duchy.

A granite cross at length loomed up against the sky on a lofty ridge, and its significance here uplifted upon the confines of her new life sent a throb to Mrs. Malherb's heart.

"This be Ter Hill," said Harvey Woodman to Grace: "an' thicky cross be one of many set up around about by God fearing men some time since Adam. Now, if you'll look down into the valley, you'll see a light like a Jack o' Lantern. That's your home, Miss."

With mingled feelings the women gazed, where square and ruddy spots, sunk deep in the silver night, outlined the windows of the farm and welcomed them. The pack-horses, with heavily laden crooks upon their backs, arrived. Then Malherb led the way, and his cavalcade went slowly down the hill.

Only one face from the past welcomed Mrs. Malherb and Grace, where Kekewich stood and lighted them up the steps to the front door. Supper awaited the party; then, aweary, and with the emotions of a stranger in a strange land, the girl retired to her little chamber facing west, and her mother sought the company of Dinah Beer and Mrs. Woodman. She found them amiable, courteous, and kindly. Their outlook upon life was not sanguine, yet a warmth of heart marked them, and the sternness of their days had left no special impress upon their simple natures. Sympathy brightened their eyes—a sentiment that astonished the new mistress, for she had not often met with it from her inferiors. Yet these women appreciated the fact that she was faced with new problems and new difficulties. They had also seen something of Mr. Malherb and learned to appraise his qualities.

"You'll come to it, ma'am," said Dinah Beer, "same as your butivul cows did. They was worritted cruel at first. That gert red 'un, with a white star on her forehead—'Marybud' by name—why, I could a'most swear that her shed tears when first she got here; but now she an' the rest have settled to the Moor an' larned the ways of it like Christians."

"An' master be to the manner born," declared Mary Wood-

an. "My man says he never seed a gentleman gather knowledge so quick. Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt from Tor Royal was over here last week, an' he said us had all done wonders."

The wife readily gathered up this comfort, and presently, ere she entered into sleep, a gentle satisfaction crowned her spirit, and her thoughts were a prayer, half thankfulness, half petition.

Her daughter, too, from gloom arose into a healthy cheerfulness. She set about ordering her treasures to her liking, and did not retire until midnight. Then, where a sinking moon touched the river mists with light, she gazed, plucked happiness from that wonderful spectacle, and so slept contented and trustful of her destiny.

Early in the morning, hungering for the first glimpse of this new world, Grace hastened to her window and looked out upon Dartmoor. A lark, invisible in the blue above, found her heart in that dawn hour. The day was glorious, and the bird music dimmed her eyes, so that the girl had to blink a little before she could see the outspread world. Beneath her the farm threw its shadow upon reclaimed heath and ploughed land. New grey walls extended round about, and raw pinewood gates marked the enclosures. Beyond stretched out the cup of the mire, and sere rushes still spread a pallor upon it, where ridge after ridge of peat ranged away until detail vanished in the prevailing monochrome. Red sunrise fires touched this waste into genial colour, and threads of gold flashed through its texture where streamlets ran. Majestic size and fundamental simplicity marked the materials of the sunrise pageant. The Swincombe River sang on her way to Dart; Fox Tor's turrets, touched with rose, ascended southward, and beyond, looming darkly against the south, appeared the bosom of Cater's Beam. A spire of blue smoke, miles away in the brown distance, marked Lovey Lee's hut, while northerly rose infant plantations at Tor Royal, and the spring light of larches made a home upon the hill, and spoke of human enterprise.

Grace drank the crystal air and listened to the lark. Then another sight arrested her, and she noted, upon a little mound at the edge of the river, a cross above three broad, shallow steps. It stood upon a square pedestal which had been bevelled by chamfering around the socket, and Grace knew that she saw the historic cenotaph of Childe the Hunter.

The lark, the river, the cross, all spoke their proper message,

and kind chance had willed that this first day of the new life should be lovely, heralded by sunshine, unfolded beneath blue skies. Grace Malherb's young spirit swam out through the golden gates of the morning, and she praised her God in wordless thoughts. A leaden day, haunted by low and crawling mists, a welcome of dripping rain, and the plover's melancholy mew, had awakened other emotions; but instead was this embodiment of triumphant spring—a dawn of cloudless glory and the lark's uplifted joy.

Half an hour later Grace was watching Mrs. Beer milk "Mary-bud." Dinah—a brown-faced woman with neat wrists and ankles, grey eyes, and a face still pretty—looked up from under her sunbonnet, where her cheek was pressed against the cow, and saw a tall, rather thin maiden who had just stopped growing. With loving hand Nature had completed! girl's five feet eight inches, and now she was about to turn the child into a fair woman. This the dairymaid readily perceived.

"Us must keep the best of the cream for 'e, Miss," she said. "You wants for they pretty hands to be plumper, an' your cheeks too."

"How kind to think of such a thing! I can return the compliment, Mrs. Beer."

"Nay; I've had my plump time. I be near five-an'-forty. Yet I was round once, an' so milky as a young filbert nut. Now I be in the middle season, when us does our hard work. But you—I seem Dartmoor will soon bring colour to your cheeks, though it couldn't make they eyes no brighter. Here, take an' drink, will 'e? I love to see young things drinking milk. Milk be the very starting-place of life, come to think of it. I never had no babies, worse luck, though I always felt a gert softness for 'em."

"But I'm not a baby, Mrs. Beer; I'm nearly seventeen!"

Grace laughed and drank. The lustre of her red lips dulled through the milky film. She gasped after her drink, and Dinah saw her small white teeth.

"You'm a bowerly maiden," she said, with extreme frankness. "So lovely as the bud o' the briar in June; an' Dartmoor will make a queen of 'e afore long. Fresh air, an' sweet water, an' miles of heather to ride over. Your eyes be old friends to me, miss—the brown of the leaves in autumn—just like my dead sister's."

"I have my father's eyes," said Grace; but Dinah questioned it.

"His be darker far. There ban't no storm in yours—they don't flash lightning. An', please God, they'll have no cause to rain either. Wealth's a wonderful thing, though what's best **worth money ban't purchasable all the same.**"

Richard Beer had arrived and heard his wife's platitude.

"Money's a power 'pon Dartymoor, however," he said, "an' I'm glad the master 'pears to be made of it, if I may say so without offence, Miss."

"Not at all," declared Grace. "Father isn't made of money, and you mustn't think so. He looks for a return very soon for all his outlay."

Beer touched his hat with great respect before answering.

"As to that, mustn't count on no miracles, Miss Malherb. The master be larning that a'ready. Us can't go no quicker'n Nature's own gait. She won't be pushed because a chap here an' there goes bankrupt. 'Tis only at love-making she works so fast, not at farm-making."

"Her ways do often look slow to a man in a hurry," said Dinah.

"But us have got to wait for 'em to work, all the same," concluded Beer, "an' all the cusses of David never made one blade o' grass sprout so quick as a drop of warm rain."

This apparent allusion to her father's forcible modes of speech saddened Grace.

"'Tis very true," she answered, then turned to the house and went in to breakfast.

CHAPTER VI

MR. PETER NORCOT

THREE months after the arrival of Maurice Malherb's family at Fox Tor Farm, a visitor appeared to spend some days with them. Mr. Peter Norcot set out from his home at Chagford and rode across the Moor on a fine morning in July; while before him at dawn a pack-horse with his luggage had started upon the same journey. Leaving certain final directions at the great factory by Teign River, in which he was a partner, the wool-stapler ascended from his home to Dartmoor, climbed a broad common or two, and in little more than an hour after noon he trotted southward over the mighty crest of Hameldon.

Norcot was a handsome, fair man of five-and-thirty. The only ugly feature of his face appeared in an exaggerated chin. For the rest, his countenance showed strength and abundant determination. Any special distinction was lacking from it. He exhibited a breezy and amiable exterior to the world, loved a jest and doted upon an epigram. Frank honesty marked his utterances, and his outlook upon life was generous. He had no enemies, and enjoyed considerable wealth, for despite the wars, his business prospered, and his grievances in connection with it were more apparent than real. A humorous and hearty manner concealed some traits of Peter's character, for tremendous tenacity of purpose hid itself beneath superficial lightness of demeanour. He had a great gift of constancy that rose superior to side issues. His first object in life was to marry Grace Malherb, and now he strove to win his way by careful study of the girl and by every delicate art that he knew. Her father was upon his side, and the end seemed assured; but Peter desired that Grace should come to him of her own free will.

Now misfortune unexpected overtook the lover, for out of fiery sunshine crept a sudden mist, and soon the clouds grew dense

and the day changed. The fog in streaks and patches swept down with heavy and increasing density, until man and horse were brushed with its cold fingers. The light waned as evening approached, and the mist thickened steadily into fine dense rain. Norcot's hair dripped, his eyebrows were frosted, and he felt the cold drops running from his hat under his collar. The unexpected change of weather caused him no irritation, for the man was never known to lose his temper, and that fact, in a tempestuous and ill educated age, won for him wide measure of respect.

Now he murmured scraps from various sacred and profane authors and addressed them aloud to his horse.

"We must keep the weather on our right cheek, nag. Tut, tut! How vast this silence and gloom! It helps us to know our place in nature, albeit we have lost our place in it. Lost, and found by being lost! Ha, ha!

"Come, man,
Hyperbolized Nothing! know thy span,
Take thine own measure here: down, down and bow
Before thyself in thine Idea, thou
Huge emptiness!

"Crashaw, I thank thee. And I pray that thou wilt help me with Lady Grace. 'All daring dust and ashes,' indeed, to hope in that quarter; but time is on my side. She must yield—eh, Victor?"

The horse pricked his ears at sound of his name and splashed on, leaving a trail behind him where he had brushed the moisture from heath and grass. By Norcot's calculations he should now have been nearing the valley of West Dart, and from thence he hoped to hit the mouth of the Swincombe River, and so reach his destination; but time passed; the faint wind blew now on one cheek, now upon the other, and at length Mr. Norcot realised that he was quite hopelessly lost. The darkness crowded in upon him and肘ed him; not one whisper penetrated it. He pulled up, drank a dram from a little silver spirit flask, and listened for the murmur of running water. But another sound suddenly rewarded him. A shadow flitted across the gloom, and a thin, old voice was heard lifted up in song.

"A ha'penny for a rook;
A penny for a jay;
A noble for a fox;
An' twelpence for a gray!"

"Well met, neighbour!" shouted Norcot. "And since you sing, I doubt not you are happy; and since you are happy, you have a home and know the way to it."

"'Ess fay! An' you too, sir. I be Leaman Cloberry, coney-catcher of Dartmeet. An' who be you?"

"One Peter Norcot, from Chagford. This is not my country, and I'm seeking the River Swincombe—have been doing so for many hours in vain. Now 'Light thickens; and the crow Makes wing to the rooky wood.' But where's the river?"

"You be within half a mile of it, your honour."

"Then I came straighter than I knew. That's the reward for always going straight, Mr. Cloberry; when darkness overtakes us, we go straight still. It has become a habit. I want the new farm of Mr. Malherb beneath Cater's Beam. And you shall show me the way thereto."

Leaman Cloberry shifted a small bag that he carried on his shoulder. He was bound in the same direction; but while Norcot might be supposed a friend to Fox Tor Farm, Cloberry crept thither with intentions the reverse of friendly. He had chosen the fog for a dark purpose. Now, however, he hid his designs and spoke.

"I know the piace and a good few of the men as works there."

"How do they prosper? Malherb and Dartmoor must be flint and steel. Yet the man will prove tougher than the granite, I hope."

Cloberry stroked a red mark on his cheek.

"Did you hear tell what chanced to Holne Church a week ago?" he asked

"No, I did not."

"My gentleman from Fox Tor Farm took his ladies there to worship. An' I comed along same time with a vixen fox an' two cubs to hang 'em up in the sight of the nation, so as all men might see I'd earned my money. An' he falled on me like a cat-a-moutain, an' used awfulest language ever let fly in a burying-ground, an' hit me across the face with his whip."

"I'm heartily sorry and ashamed to hear it. Under a sacred fane, too! I grieve for this. It is a lesson to us all. Yet to kill foxes! Tut, tut! 'Volpone, by blood and rank a gentleman.' I preserve game myself, yet pay tithe unquestioning to reynard."

"'Twas assault and battery, whether or no. An' Squire he took Malherb's part, an' parson was o' my side. An' I said as folks must live, an' Malherb, in his lofty way, sees the force of that, an' flings me half a sovereign. But I let it bide on the ground. You can't batter a man like that on a Sunday morning for money. I'm set against him, and I'll set other folk against him too."

"Think better of it. Half a sovereign is a very convenient embodiment of ten shillings. Take this one for showing me my way. 'I would be friends with you and have your love.' It is my rule of life."

Cloberry accepted the coin thus offered, declared that Peter was a hero, and presently put him upon his road to Fox Tor. But after Mr. Norcot had trotted out of sight, his guide followed in the same direction. The old man skulked under a wall until darkness had fallen upon the moor; then, walking out boldly into a fine piece of meadow-land upon which Maurice Malherb especially prized himself, he opened his sack and took therefrom a box with a pierced top. Gentle squeaking came from inside this receptacle; and now, opening it, Cloberry released a dozen fat and lively moles.

"There, my little velvet-coats!" he said; "go to work an' tear the heart out of him when he sees what you can do. Increase an' multiply, my dears, like the children of Israel; an' presently I'll bring up a dozen more to help 'e!"

The moles crawled about uneasily, but presently began to dig and sink into the earth. The fog had lifted, and the lights of Fox Tor Farm now shone across the night. Leaman Cloberry shook his fist at them.

"That's a beginning," he growled. "An' I'll bring rats for your byres an' stoats for your hen-roosts. I'll plague you; I'll fret your gizzard! An' I wish that I was Moses, for then I'd fetch along all the plagues of Egypt against 'e an' break your stone heart!"

Meanwhile, as the vermin-catcher tramped homeward, and presently so far recovered good temper as to sing his only song, Peter Norcot found a welcome and much sympathy. Malherb now regarded himself as an old Dartmoor man, familiar with every possible freak and manifestation of Nature upon the waste. He explained to Norcot the course proper to be pursued

in a fog, and Peter, whose knowledge of the Moor extended from boyhood, listened very gravely, acknowledged his errors, and praised the older man's shrewdness in the matter.

Before dinner Mr. Malherb, in all the splendour of fine black, new pumps, and a frilled shirt-front with a diamond in it, went off to his cellar for those remarkable wines that he assured familiar guests were now no longer in the market; while the lover enjoyed some precious moments with his lady. Grace looked fair to see in her white muslin and blue ribbons. She wore the high waist of the period; her hair towered in a mass on the top of her head, yet little prim curls hung like flowers on either side; white shoes cased her feet, and the elastic of them made a cross between her ankles.

"The Moor suits you nobly, dear Grace," said Mr. Norcot, who was himself resplendent. "I never saw you lovelier."

"Do leave all that," she said. "Let us meet in peace."

"So be it," he answered, and continued—

"Gracie, I swear by all I ever swore,
That from this hour I shall not love thee more,—
What! love no more? Oh! why this altered vow?
Because I *cannot* love thee *more* than now!"

A gentle look came into his blue eyes as he gazed upon her. It was not natural to them, but he had practised it often before the looking-glass, and could assume it at pleasure.

"Still occupied with other men's jests, Peter. If you only understood me! Do you know why I love Dartmoor? Because it leaves me alone. Because it cares no more for me than for the ant that crawls on the grass-blade. So big, so grand, so stern it is. And it always tells the truth."

"You are quite wrong. The Moor loves with a hopeless passion. It has kissed you. I see the print of its kisses on your cheek. It has kissed your little elbow, for I note a dimple there that is new to me."

Grace frowned and pulled up her mitten. She sat upon the music-stool, struck a note or two, and did not answer. Peter sighed.

"You are cold, you are cold," he said. "What does Wycherley remark? 'Out of Nature's hands they came plain, open, silly, and fit for slaves, as she and heaven intended 'em: but damned Love——' There it is! 'Blessed Love,' if you happened to

love me ; doubly, trebly 'damned Love,' since your heart is set on somebody else."

"Not at all. I love nobody. I hate the word."

"And you are seventeen to-morrow !

" 'On that auspicious day began the race
Of every virtue joined in one sweet Grace.' "

"What is my birthday to you, Peter ?"

"You can ask that ! I *must* answer in an epigram. There is only one reply possible. Martial—but I know a beautiful translation :—

" 'Believing hear what you deserve to hear :
Your birthday as my own to me is dear ;
But yours gives most ; for mine did only lend
Me to the world ; yours gave to me a friend.' "

Only that word 'friend' is too weak."

"I wish you would be content with friendship, and not fret me to death with all this nonsense. Do you know that father has bought me a lovely hunter for a birthday gift ?"

"I do. And that horse will want a whip—until he knows your voice ; and that whip Peter Norcot has provided. 'Tis almost worthy of you—a pretty toy."

"I don't want your whip," she said.

Mr. Norcot cast about for something from *The Taming of the Shrew* ; but he changed his mind. Meantime Grace spoke again.

"I shall be sorry to give up riding my poor little 'Russet.' Still, he's not up to my weight now ; and he's growing elderly and lazy, and I'm to hunt next season. Won't it be lovely ?"

"Our Dartmoor blades will hunt no more foxes ; they'll hunt for smiles from you," said Peter gloomily.

"You shall have some good long gallops with me if you will. I'm mastering the country well, and now with 'Cæsar'—that's my new horse—I shall be able to go twice as far as formerly."

"I rejoice. You must take me upon your favourite rides."

"One has a horrid fascination for me. 'Tis to the top of North Hisworthy Tor above Prince Town. From there you can look straight down into that great War Prison—the saddest sight for any woman's eyes."

Mr. Malherb entered at this moment.

"A tender fool," he said, "and her mother no better. Eight

thousand French tigers behind those bars; and these women in their silly way would set 'em loose to-morrow."

"They long for their dens and their cubs, poor fellows," said Grace.

"They fought for their country—that's their only sin," murmured Annabel Malherb.

"They fought against England—that's their sin," retorted her husband hotly. "The lying, slippery rascals! Dartmoor's too good for 'em. Honour! Three broke parole at Ashburton last week!"

"Isn't it wonderful? They play games and hold concerts and have play-acting!" said Grace.

"Their vile French levity," answered her father. "Instead of being on their knees asking God to forgive 'em, they dance and sing."

Mr. Norcot shook his head, as though to imply he echoed Malherb's sentiments. Then he asked a question, but did not guess the storm it would awaken.

"And what about the American prisoners?"

"Curse 'em!" roared the farmer, like a sudden explosion of thunder. "Curse 'em living and dying, and, if I had my way, I'd hang the foul traitors—every man. Our own flesh and blood—a British Colony——"

"I'm afraid 'tis idle to dream that any more. The tea business. Never was such a shattering storm bred in a teacup before," answered Norcot. "A bad day for England——"

"Matricides, murderers, insolent democratical scoundrels!" cried the other. "My blood boils at the name. How is it that the Almighty has not sunk their stolen continent fathoms deep in the sea to cleanse it? Why are they allowed to live? Pirates—slave-driving, slave-hunting, slave-breeding pirates, and lynchers, and blackguards—self-constituted a Nation. *A Nation!* They make you believe in Hell against your will."

"They have more pluck and originality than the French, I am told," said Peter calmly. "They escape in a wonderful manner; they give the guards ceaseless trouble and anxiety."

"For why? They're bastard English. They've got our blood in their veins. 'Twill take a few generations yet ere it all runs into the sink and leaves nothing but mongrel. A poisoned race—a fallen race. Pride has ruined 'em; as it ruined the Devil,

their dam. Hanging, drawing, quartering, I say! No honest man——"

"Come to dinner, Maurice," said Mrs. Malherb. "And don't thus rage before eating. 'Tis very bad for you. They are at least out of mischief now, poor creatures."

"Never," answered her husband. "An American is never out of mischief until he is dead."

"The prison should be a good, handy market for farm produce," ventured Peter.

"It is ; but I'd rather starve than touch their vile money," said Malherb.

He gave his arm to his daughter and went to the dining-room, while Mr. Norcot and Mrs. Malherb followed them.

Kekewich always waited upon the family, and not seldom he was addressed during the course of a meal concerning subjects within his wide knowledge. Now the talk turned to trade, and Norcot explained a serious problem of his own business.

"Everything is depressed in these fighting times," he said. "One looks for that and provides for it. But what shall be thought of our principal customers, the East India Company? Wool don't get cheaper, that's very certain, but they are sending down the price of long ells half-a-crown a piece. They say that our woollens are often a drug in the Indian market ; and now to remedy the thin web, every piece of long ell in stripes shall weigh twelve pounds. We work web at coarser pitch to meet this want, and, of course, defeat the object of the demand by producing rubbish."

The conversation became profoundly technical, and Malherb, who deemed himself an expert upon wool, as upon most other subjects, uttered great words. Then Kekewich, himself an old wool-comber, became so interested that he forgot his business. At last he could stand it no more, but set down a dish violently and plunged into conversation, much to Norcot's entertainment. He perceived, however, that Kekewich knew far more about the matter than Mr. Malherb, and when the servant was from the room made a jest upon him.

"A wonderful man, and sane too. Sound sense—every word of it.

" 'Old Kek doth with his lantern jaws
Throw light upon the woollen laws.' "

"And upon most other matters," declared Grace. "And his thoughts are all his own—borrowed from nobody."

"It happens to me," confessed Peter, "that the things I think have always been better worded by others. With becoming modesty, therefore, I borrow."

According to modern ideas of courtesy, Mrs. Malherb and her daughter were somewhat slighted during the progress of dinner; but women listened more and talked less a hundred years ago than now. Annabel saw that Peter's plate and glass were kept full, chatted with her daughter, laughed at her husband's jests, and departed to the drawing-room as soon as the table was cleared. Then Kekewich deposited two silver candlesticks and a pair of silver snuffers within reach of his master, produced a dish of dry walnuts, and tenderly stationed a bottle of port at the elbow of each gentleman.

"I know you're only a one-bottle man, and you are wise at your age," said Malherb. "Indeed, I seldom do more my f, save on rare occasions, and never except during the hunting season."

"I hope you'll account for two bottles upon the day I marry Mistress Grace," answered Peter. "She grows an angel. Never beamed such radiant beauty."

"Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do intreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return."

But I wish they would twinkle for me."

"To-morrow she is seventeen—God bless her! They are my heart and my soul—she and my son. But she's yours, Norcot, for I've said it. She shall reign over your place at Chagtord. Her welfare is my first care in this world. Now leave that. Let our talk be about sheep. I have discovered that Dartmoor is the best sheep-walk in the kingdom. We shall have such wool for you next year as will make you generous against your will. Already I'm treating for certain three-year-old Dartmoor wethers that'll shear nine pounds of unwashed wool a fleece. Think of it! Take one shilling and threepence a pound and five hundred sheep—the result is nearly three hundred pounds of money in one year! Then I design to cross with the new Leicesters. Frankly, I see a large fortune within ten years. It can hardly be avoided."

Mr. Norcot nodded thoughtfully. He knew the farmer's figures were absurdly high, both in wool and money.

"You look so far ahead. I always envy you that gift of foresight. Yet, in sober honesty, you must not count to get more than a shilling a pound. If you could breed Merinos now."

"I've thought of that, too."

"Ah! I'll wager you have," said the merchant, with admiration. "What don't you think of, Mr. Malherb? 'Tis good to know that another man of ideas has come on Dartmoor."

So the talk and the wine sped, and presently they joined the ladies. Annabel was at the piano, and Grace sat beside a peat fire, engaged with her needle. While the music ran, Peter, inspired by dinner and the fair maiden under his eyes, pulled forth a notebook and adventured an original rhyme. He was hurt at the girl's recent allusion, and now determined to reveal powers unsuspected. But the gem he designed would not polish, and Grace herself went to the piano to sing an exceedingly doleful ballad before Mr. Norcot's effort was complete. Then he handed it to her in a book, while Mrs. Malherb spoke aside to Dinah Beer, and the master, who cared little for music, perused an agricultural survey of Devon.

Miss Malherb read, and her lip curled visibly.

"Sweet vestal Gracie's lovely eyes have lighted
Such fires within his breast that Peter's frightened;
For now, behold! This man of noble mettle
Doth feel his heart boil over like a kettle."

Annabel still talked with her woman, and Grace, after brief cogitation, wrote a few lines under Mr. Norcot's effort, and handed it back again. He saw what she had said, and smiled—

"Though water boils apace and fire be bold,
Pour one on t'other, quickly both grow cold.
Therefore, good Peter, let thy heart boil over.
'Twill ease thee of thy pain; me of my lover."

He tore a scrap from the bottom of the sheet, and concluded the correspondence.

When Grace bade her father and his guest farewell and reached her room, she scanned Mr. Norcot's final comment, and found that it needed no reply. He had merely written—

"The epigrammatist rejoices; but the man weeps."

CHAPTER VII

THE WAR PRISON

ON the morning of her seventeenth birthday, Grace rode forth upon the new hunter, and tenderly touched 'Caesar's' flank with a whip of dainty workmanship. Peter, on his black horse, accompanied her, and Mr. Malherb stood at the door of Fox Tor Farm and watched them depart.

"A fine couple," he said to his wife. "One sees that Grace has got my skill in horsemanship now that she is properly mounted."

"And he rides well, too."

"So, so. Better than most young men. She's coming to my way of thinking. She laughs with him now and exchanges jests."

His wife shook her head.

"I misdoubt her. She's a Malherb—a jog-trot tradesman will never win her."

"Have done with such nonsense!" he said sharply. "He is no more a tradesman than am I. You should have better feeling than to use the word."

"She won't marry him, nevertheless," said Mrs. Malherb placidly.

"Will she not? If I am her father she will."

He turned and departed, while his wife, with a cloud upon her countenance, watched Mr. Norcot and Grace climb the steep side of Fox Tor and proceed to the heights above it.

Soon afterwards, as they turned their horses' heads toward Prince Town, Peter observed a strange, tall figure proceeding on foot in the same direction. It was as though one of the moorland crosses from the Abbot's Way had come to life and stole over the wilderness upon some superhuman errand.

"Look!" cried Norcot, "a walking scarecrow!"

Grace recognised the being, and laughed.

"A 'scarecrow,' you say. That's the richest woman on Dartmoor!"

"A woman—and a wealthy one? Impossible!"

"'Tis Lovey Lee, an old servant of my grandfather's. By chance she lives here within a few miles of Fox Tor Farm. We shall pass her hovel presently."

"Was it not she whom your father accused of stealing the amphora when Sir Nicholas died?"

"Yes; and he still vows that she has it, for all her oaths to the contrary. She's a weird old woman. Her grandson, John, tells me that she lives upon frogs and herb tea."

They were now abreast of the dame, and Peter inspected her carefully.

"Tut, tut! She does not throw away money upon her apparel," he said.

"No—isn't it horrid? I think she wears old sacks chiefly."

"And reduces them to the minimum. Her naked feet must be made of iron."

"Good morning, Lovey," said Grace. "Have you been to Holne? No; I see that you haven't, for you carry no basket."

"Mornin', maiden; an' to you, my gentleman," she answered very civilly. "No more Holne for me. I've got a better market for my poor goods now; an' nearer."

"The War Prison?"

"Ess fay! Plenty of money there for them that have anything to sell. I can scrape a few pence out of they Americans every week; though how I keep body an' soul together is my daily wonder."

"You would do it easier if you wore more petticoats, granny," said Peter.

"Petticoats!" she answered. "'Tis very well for the likes of you, bursting wi' fatness under your fine linen, to talk o' petticoats. Give me a crown an' I'll buy one—since you'm so anxious about it."

"Why, you're the richest woman on the Moor, Lovey," said Grace. "You know perfectly well that you have a gold mine hidden away somewhere."

The old woman showed her teeth and growled like a dog.

"Don't you tell that trash, or you'll make me your enemy, I promise you! A gold mine—some 'crock o' gold' hid at a

rainbow's foot or in a dead man's grave—the fools tell about up here. I wish I knowed where. Do a woman salt down reptiles and make her meal of blind-worms and berries if she have got a gold mine hidden?"

"That's just what father says you would do," answered Grace.

"Tell Malherb to mind his business," she answered sourly, "or 'twill be the worse for him. 'Twill take him all his time to find a gold mine under Fox Tor, anyway, let alone the Lord's hand being against him for stealing the earth from the meek, as was meant to inherit it."

"Nothing of the sort," answered Grace, with great indignation. "She's a horrid old story-teller, Peter."

But Norcot never quarrelled with man or mouse.

"Mrs. Lee is naturally against the Duchy," he said. "The Duchy we all know. But, on the other hand, nobody alive can blame your father for availing himself of its propensities."

"He'll curse himself for a fool yet, however," said the old woman.

"I shall not be friendly with you any more, Lovey Lee," answered Grace frankly. "You're greedier than the Duchy, and you don't tell the truth. You wouldn't be so unpleasant if your conscience didn't hurt you. Henceforth I shall think with my father that you took the amphora."

"You may think what you please. It won't prove nothing but that you've got a Malherb habit of mind and be your father's daughter."

"Come. Peter!" cried Grace. "I'll hear no more."

She trotted away, and, having dropped a coin behind him, Mr. Norcot followed. It was his sagacious custom never to lose any opportunity of making a friend. He had found possibilities of usefulness in the humblest road-mender; and this woman, with her evident strength and ferocity, attracted him. He perceived that she was one who would do anything within her power for payment.

Lovey picked up the money with a loud blessing on the giver. Then she watched the retreating figures.

"They be coming courting a'ready," she thought, "an' her only a half-growed giglet yet. Well, let the sky fall an' the sun burn blue, a crown be still a crown."

Before the old woman had reached home, Grace and Peter

Norcot passed her cabin, and the wool-stapler showed more interest before Lovey's grin abode than at the more striking object close at hand. Siward's Cross was dismissed with a nod, but Mrs. Lee's lair awakened a lively attention.

"There she lives with only a wall of piled peat between her and her cows and donkey. She's got a grandson—a very handsome, courteous young fellow—and he dwells in that stable there. In her kitchen you would find stones for chairs."

"And stones for bread by the look of it. A cheerful soul. I wonder where her hiding-place may be? Did you see her glittering eyes—like two diamonds set in yellow ivory—and the fingers all crooked like a hawk's claws. She's a miser, or I never met one. And yet 'God but little asks where little's given.' Perhaps we wrong her."

"Father never wrongs anybody," answered Grace. "He storms, indeed, and will have his way; but good men always like him, and understand his noble qualities."

"Most true—one in a thousand. I'm thankful beyond measure that he is pleased to think well of me; for he'd never bestow his friendship on an unworthy object."

"One word for father; two for Peter Norcot."

"It is so; I rise above false modesty. If a good man praises me, it is my best advertisement before the world."

"You have a wonderful way with father."

"I was looking into John Guillim's book a day or two since. He is an old-time Pursuivant at Arms. Upon your family name and the three nettle leaves, which you'll see cut in the amethyst at the handle of your riding-whip, you shall find a quaint word or two. Guillim says the nettle is of so tetchie and froward a nature that no man may meddle with it, and he adds that a little girl being once stung thereby, complained to her father that there was such a curst herb in his garden, that it was worse than a dog, for it would bite them of its own house. Her father told her that the herb's nature was a notable impartiality, for friend and foe were alike to it. Then there's a pleasant epigram—

"Tender-handed stroke a nettle,
And it stings you for your pains;
Grasp it like a man of mettle,
And it soft as silk remains."

Not that that applies to Mr. Malherb."

"No, indeed! Father is no nettle," said Grace sharply.

"Most true. The nettle's flower is plain, not exquisitely beautiful," he answered, looking at her. "Your father has the sturdy characteristics of his house, none of the prickles. A grand singleness of purpose marks his ways."

"He feels too deeply, if anything."

"And too much feeling so often obscures perception. It is unfortunate."

"There's the War Prison," said Grace, changing the subject: "that dreadful thing stretching out down there—a ring within a ring. I always think it is like something in Dante made real."

"Dante, eh? Hell, and so forth. Yes, that's a hell for many a brave, lonely heart. Doubtless there are lovers among 'em. By the way, I thought your dear father was a little hard upon the American prisoners—if I may dare to say so."

"He knows best," said Grace firmly; "and they do give a great deal of trouble. To break away from their mother country over a paltry question of money!"

"It's wonderful how soon matters of money make every question acute—lift it into a serious affair. Men will argue about their Maker, or the chances of Eternity, or the heat of the sun, with irreproachable temper; but let the matter be a sovereign—As to America—taxes or no taxes—fools in our Parliament or fools in their Congress—it had to come. Look at a map of the world."

"In this war, at any rate, they are utterly mistaken," said Grace. "I know all about it, and facts are facts."

"And facts never contradict each other. That's a blessing."

"No doubt the wrong men are suffering now," she added, looking down upon the prison: "but that is a general rule in war."

"And life. What a beehive it is! 'A dungeon horrible on all sides round.' Hark! you can hear the 'sorrowful sighing of the prisoners.' Or rather you can hear their laughter. In fact, they appear to be playing a game in that far-off corner. It must be prisoners' base, no doubt."

"I pity every one of them, and especially the poor little powder-monkeys we captured in their ships," she said.

The huge circumference of the War Prison stretched beneath them, protected from the West under North Hisworthy Tor; the limbo, at once famous and infamous, lay here in summer sunshine; and never had Time thrown up a mushroom ring more grim, more

grey, upon earth's lovely face. In the midst of wild hills and stone-crowned heights, skirted by the waters of a stream, separated from mankind by miles of scattered granite and black bog, the War Prison appeared. Late July ruled the land and brushed the hills with green: the light of the ling was just dawning, and all life rejoiced: but the solemn features of these stony mountains, fold upon fold and range upon range, take no softness to the stranger's eye at any season, and none who has not trodden it in freedom can love its austere face, or understand its chasten'd glory. Purple cloud-shadows drifted over the prison, and revealed the details of Alexander's sinister masterpiece. Previously they had been hidden by a great dazzle of sunlight.

Some thirty acres were enclosed by two walls, one within the other. The outer circle stood sixteen feet high; and separated from it by a broad military parade, extended the second wall, hung with bells on wires, and having sentry-boxes upon it at regular intervals, to overlook each prison yard. The main area of the gaol was of rounded shape, and contained five enormous rectangular masses of masonry radiating from the centre, like spokes from the hub of a wheel. At one side a segment was cut out of the circle, and this contained the Governor's offices, the turnkey's place, and other official buildings, together with an open space into which the country people were admitted for their daily traffic with the prisoners. Fuel, vegetables, poultry, butter, and other articles were bought and sold in this market, and upon its completion the gangs returned to their own divisions of the gaol. Each of the five main buildings mentioned was constructed to hold fifteen hundred men, all had two floors, and in the roof of every one was an additional great chamber used as a promenade at times of unusually inclement weather. Each block possessed its own wide exercise yard and shelter from snow or rain, its proper supply of sweet water always running, and its *cachot*, or prison within a prison, for punishment of the refractory and disobedient. A hospital and accommodation for petty officers included the edifices within the walls, while a quarter of a mile distant were barracks for four hundred troops, and various other buildings not all connected with the establishment of the prison. Of these the more conspicuous were a ruined cottage on the slope north-eastward of the outer wall, two new taverns, about which the soldiers swarmed like red ants; bakehouses, slaughter-houses,

and private habitations that rapidly grew into a little street. The prisoners themselves were scattered by the thousand over their exercise yards, with red-coats stationed upon the inner wall around them. At one point outside the War Prison a large building arose and, guarded by the soldiery, a crowd of men laboured upon it.

"They are making a church," explained Grace. "The French build and the Americans do the carving and the woodwork inside. 'Tis to be dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels."

"Then you have a personal interest in it. And maybe I too shall have. We might even be married there."

"We might—though not to one another."

"Who knows? Time can work wonders."

"But only God can work miracles."

"Beautiful!" he said, "and comforting too; for I am one who holds that the age of miracles has not yet gone. You shall find the man of parts will make his own miracles."

The
their
ound
arose
n it.
rench
side.

I too

who
find

CHAPTER VIII

A LITTLE ACCIDENT

AS they descended into Prince Town Grace proposed to visit the church now growing there. She knew one Lieutenant Mainwaring, a young officer in command at these works; and now, glad enough to be of service and display his little power, the lad himself escorted Miss Malherb and Peter Norcot into a scene of stir and activity.

The Frenchmen chattered and sang to the clink of their trowels; while within, more thoughtful and more silent, a hundred Americans were engaged upon carpentering and carving in wood and stone. The strangers regarded Grace with curiosity. Save for the market folk, it was long since any among them had seen a woman, and this lovely girl awoke invisible emotion. Many a heart quickened, then slowed at the sight of her. She wakened the thought of women in lonely bosoms; she bridged rolling oceans with a sigh. Some cursed as memory probed their helplessness; some sneered; some winked and whistled and kissed their hands; some, sensitively conscious, turned away to hide their rags from these well-clothed and prosperous visitors.

They were soldiers and sailors, and they exhibited a wide variety of spiritual and vital attributes. Many among them crept about like thin ghosts clad in motley; a few looked stout and happy, despite their shameful clothing; some toiled in sulky and wooden silence; others maintained a gay and alert demeanour. They wore yellow roundabout jackets, mostly too small, rough waistcoats and pantaloons, shirts, caps of wool, and shoes made from list and wood, that gaped at every seam. Those amongst them whose shoes had fallen to pieces, cased their feet in strips

of blanket, and so limped through the dreary time until authority should refurnish them.

Young Mainwaring was called away at this moment, and before he departed, the lad turned to an elderly American with grey hair and a distinguished bearing, and asked him a favour.

"May I beg you to show Miss Malherb and this gentleman round the works, Commodore Miller?" said Mainwaring; and the prisoner bowed a grave assent. In looking at this man's sad eyes and noble face one forgot the ridiculous rags that covered him.

"Come this way, young lady," he said. "You see our labours prosper. 'Twill be a monument for the generations that follow us. Our dust will mingle with this desert and be forgotten; our handiwork will remain."

Suddenly as they proceeded a cry from overhead made Grace stop, start back, and look upward. The warning saved her life, for six inches in front of her breast an object cut the air, and striking at the girl's feet upon the unpaved aisle, buried itself head first in the earth. It was a heavy chisel that had dropped from a beam and just missed Grace's head by inches. A cry rose on several lips; some shouted a curse at a man aloft on the beam from which the chisel had fallen; and Commodore Miller cried to him—

"Good God, Stark; what have you done?"

"Nothing—nothing at all," said Grace quickly. "I am not touched."

The man responsible for this accident was already half-way to the ground. He descended a rope ladder so swiftly as to endanger his own neck, and a moment later stood white and trembling before Grace Malherb.

"You stupid fellow," said Mr. Norcot; "'twas within a hair's-breadth of her life."

"I know it," answered the man. He was young and very tall, with a clean-shorn face and curling brown hair. "I can only ask you to forgive me. I turned suddenly and my foot struck the chisel."

"There's nothing to forgive," said Grace. "'Twas your voice arrested me. If you hadn't shouted, I should not be here now; so I owe you nothing but gratitude."

She smiled at him, and the youngster's colour came back to his

cheek. Young Mainwaring, who had just returned, bustled forward with his sword clanking as the sailor spoke.

"You're good and brave, young mistress; and you understand 'Twas a noble way to pardon me. A clumsy fool thanks you from his heart."

He was turning away when Grace spoke again, and blushed a little as she did so.

"Is that your chisel, sir?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Will you give it to me? May I keep it?"

Taking it from the hand of Commodore Miller, who had pulled it out of the earth, the girl looked at its two-inch blade and glittering edge.

"I should like to keep it," she repeated. "It ought to make me feel humble and grateful when I look upon it."

"I pray you keep it, then. And I shall thank God every time that I miss it," said the young man quietly.

Norcot was talking to Mainwaring aside, and in the silence that followed these words, his voice, unfortunately for himself, came directly to the American prisoner's ear.

"Surely not. The Devil draws the line somewhere. One would never presume to suggest a deliberate intention to murder an innocent girl."

The words came clear and cold; then, like a thunderbolt, a heavy fist fell between Peter's eyes, and he was on his back half unconscious. From trembling fear, from emotion almost prayerful at the thought of what might have happened, from frank and absolute sorrow for his carelessness, the young American leapt suddenly into ungovernable and blazing wrath. His very body seemed to expand and tower above the men around him. The Commodore leapt forward, but Stark shook him off like a child.

"There!" he shouted, so that the naked walls rang with echoes. "Take that, whoever you are! To hint such a foul crime from your foul soul against an American!"

"Who's this lunatic? Arrest him," cried Mainwaring, and several soldiers hastened forward.

"Cecil Stark is his name—a sailor and a leader in Prison No. 4," said a sergeant.

"Yes, Cecil Stark of Vermont," answered the lad passionately. "Your General Burgoyne knew the name. 'Twas my kinsman

that made him surrender and so caused Louis of France and the civilised world to acknowledge America free of your bullying, braggart nation. To hint at murder! You scoundrel—if you're a gentleman, you'll meet me; but you're not."

"Candidly," said Mr. Norcot, who was now restored to consciousness and sat on the ground with his hand over his eyes. "Candidly, I don't want to meet you again. You are young, and evidently Dartmoor has not tamed your fiery spirit. Nor has it polished your nautical wits. You strike before you hear—like your great nation. Tut, tut! My nose is broken. I was just declaring on my honour that to credit you with malice was madness. 'Twas this gentleman here who suspected that you dropped the chisel of set purpose."

"*You* said it!" exclaimed Stark, turning upon Lieutenant Mainwaring.

"I did, and I repeat it; and don't look at me with that insolent expression, or you'll repent it. 'Tis quite likely this was no accident."

The American regarded the little officer with contempt and astonishment.

"You're a knave to think that; and a coward to say it. At least you don't believe him, young mistress? I'd give up all hope of freedom, or heaven either, if I thought that any woman held me so vile."

"No woman, and no man either, would believe it," said Grace calmly, and Mainwaring's face flamed.

"Why, then, I'm content," declared Stark. "As for this red-coated monkey, he's neither one nor t'other, and his opinion don't matter."

"Take him to the cachot!" cried the indignant soldier in a fury. "Away with him—insolent hound! We'll see what a few days of bread and water will do for him."

"And 'tis trash like this that they put into power over honest men!" said the prisoner, with great show of scorn. "In America no man can command others until he has learned to command himself."

"And did you use to command, my young hero?" asked Peter, who had now risen to his feet again.

Cecil Stark turned and laughed as he marched off with half a dozen soldiers for an escort.

"No, sir. You'll guess why. I'm a fool. Your nose will tell you that. But I'm learning. I shall be free again some day. Then I'll try to be wise. Meantime I beg you ten thousand pardons that I hit the wrong man. If 'tis ever in my power, I'll make generous amends."

He departed, and among the guard his great stature was revealed, for he towered above them.

"What a stinging sermon against disinterestedness," said Mr. Norcot, still patting his wounded face. "Yet 'tis nothing beside your escape. If you had died—my light would have gone out. Henceforth I should have lived with Petrarch under my pillow: 'To Laura—I mean Gracie—in death.'"

"For I was ever yours; of you bereft,
Full little do I reckon all other care."

"We'd better go back to our horses," she answered. "He's a fine courageous gentleman. Only I very much wish that he had struck Lieutenant Mainwaring instead of you."

"So do I—cordially."

"And yet I'm not quite sorry, either; for you are so kind that you pass it with a jest; that little snappy soldier would have done dreadful deeds. Why do soldiers always bear themselves with such silly pride? Sailors don't."

"Sailors are not so swollen with their own importance, certainly; they've got more intellect as a rule; and don't blush to talk about their profession, like so many of these fatuous warriors. My dismal nose! Tut, tut! I see a mountain uplifting between my eyes. Henceforth there will be another tor on Dartmoor."

"Carry the chisel, please. He had a fine deep voice. He might have been an Englishman. Certainly he was right to be furious. I will never speak to Lieutenant Mainwaring more."

"Cecil Stark of Vermont, eh? He'll be stark enough after a week in a cachot. Let us home. My nose wants its luncheon of brown paper and vinegar."

The Commodore saw them to their horses, and Grace expressed an earnest hope that young Stark would not suffer for his natural anger.

"'Twill make his trouble light enough to know you are sorry for him," said the old sailor gallantly; then he gave the girl a hand into her saddle and soon she and Mr. Norcot were galloping homewards.

Anon Mrs. Malherb uplifted placid thanksgivings for her daughter's escape, and the farmer breathed forth indignation at the adventure of the chisel. He took a dark view of the incident, despite Grace's indignant assurances, and gave it as his opinion that where an American was concerned the worst motives might most justly be attributed. Yet he made far more of the incident than anybody else, yearned towards the girl with emotion hardly concealed, and hastened over his wine after dinner, that he might return to her presence.

"Come you here," he said, "and put your fingers in mine, so I may feel you are alive."

Therefore she sat beside him, and he patted her little hand and exhibited the actions of quickened love. Yet his face was stern the while, and betrayed no spark of the softness that marked his gestures and his words.

Peter's countenance had now taken upon itself the grotesqueness of a gargoyle, but he exhibited neither self-consciousness nor irritation. Indeed, he proved in a placid and didactic vein, moralised the incidents of the day and illuminated them with many quotations from many scribes. Conversation naturally turned upon America, and Norcot declared that the hot-headed and romantic person of Cecil Stark fairly typified his country.

"Most just," allowed Maurice Malherb. "America exhibits defects so glaring that he who runs may read. She is too vain-glorious, too boastful, too impatient of control, and too ignorant ever to take commanding rank among the nations."

He mentioned his own failings without an omission.

"We must learn to walk before we can ride," said Mrs. Malherb. "And yet how often does a child try to copy its elders in advanced arts while yet the slow steps to those arts are hidden from it! 'Tis hard to judge the Americans, for they are made of our own flesh and blood."

"They are, in fact, our younger selves broke loose from tradition and control. They are scattered like sheep without a shepherd in the mighty pasture of the New World," said Norcot.

"Not so," returned his host. "England's virtues are just those most notoriously lacking in this upstart, ingrate race. They have broken the golden links of blood and brotherhood. They must abide by the consequences. Doctor Johnson was in the right of it touching America—as indeed always upon every subject."

"What think you, Kek?" asked Grace, that the discussion might be lightened.

The old servant had entered to mend the fire, for a peat or two always glowed upon the drawing-room hearth by night.

"No matter what I think, missy. 'Tis one of the few blessings of a common man that nobody do set a groat's value upon his views," returned Kekewich.

"So much the less need you mind uttering t'm," said Peter.

"We differ like flint and steel, yet strike some sparks between us—Kek and I," declared Malherb. "He is at once the best, honestest, truest, and most wrong-headed man I ever met in his class of life."

"Then you'll guess what I hold about this," answered Kekewich, who was indifferent alike to praise or censure. "I thinks that a Yankee be only an Englishman turned inside out. They says openly what we thinks in secret; but when it comes to doing—'tis 'devil take the hindmost' an' the weakest to the wall with them—just the same as it be with us. 'Tis a nation too young to deceive—same as a child be too young to deceive till it be growed. We shall hammer 'em this time; an' maybe next time; but the day will come when they've got too big to hammer. Then what? Us'll be 'pon top of our last legs some day. An' then everything will be differ'nt, except human nature. An' a beaten nation have a terrible long memory."

"This is anti-British! I blush for you, Kek," said Grace.

"Nay; the man is in the right," declared Peter. "A hundred years hence the friendship of America will be better worth having than anything in the world. Yet, where there's jealousy, there can be no real friendship. I hope that they will not always be jealous of us."

"You're cowards, both you and Kek," shouted Malherb. "You are worse than infidels, for you leave the Almighty out of your calculations altogether. We make war in the name of Right. We are the supreme example that history furnishes of an absolutely impartial nation. We display justice and mercy to the earth. We conquer by the hand of God. And will He desert us for a cowardice of curs, for a rabble that knows not justice, for a horde of highwaymen who mix the mortar for their dirty towns with negroes' blood?"

"Blare till you bust, Malherb," said Kek stoutly. "You won't

alter it. God A'mighty's never seen on the side of the weak, an' so soon as thicky folks over the sea get strong enough to lather us, they'll most likely try to do it."

With this prophecy Mr. Kekewich departed.

"An ancient fool," commented Peter; "yet a witty one. I'm quite of his opinion; but our grandchildren, not we, will see the issue."

"Read 'Lear,'" said Malherb. "'Tis the only thing I ever do read in the way of high poetry. Lear is England—America has taken the vile daughter's part."

"Doubtless they'll allow it—if you'll carry the similitude through."

"Nay—England won't go mad—a little righteous rage—a breath from her nostrils, and these republican wolves will creep back into their dens."

"Yes—to breed there; to suckle the rising generations on——"

"Upon lies!" roared the other. "Upon vile lies against the mother country. To the Father of Lies let 'em go!"

Presently he cooled down, and Mr. Norcot, who had turned to Grace for a while, was wearied to hear Malherb reopen the subject.

"If they would but learn the dignity of manhood; if they would use their brains and read in the books that wise Englishmen have written on the highest duty of man, we might hope for the return of the prodigal son even yet," he said; and Peter answered—

"How true; how generous of you to put it so; how grand! 'The whole duty of man'—so vast, yet so simple—like Dartmoor. A dozen words gives one, a dozen lines from an artist's pencil will convey the vision of the other."

"'Tis all in the best authors, I'm sure," declared Annabel.

"It is, indeed. What does Juvenal say in an inspired moment? 'A sane mind in a sane body. A spirit above the fear of death; a spirit that can endure toil; that counts the labours of Hercules his joys and the joys of a certain goddess her shame; a spirit that can keep its——'" He was going to say "temper," but substituted "self-respect" out of consideration for his host, then made an end. "'Through virtue lies the life of peace! Grasp that fact, and Fortune has no divinity left in her.'"

"All good," admitted Malhe-b, "except in one particular. A

A LITTLE ACCIDENT

61

life of peace is not to be prayed for. Peace is rust, and makes against human progress. Now, ladies, it is time that you retired."

Annabel and her daughter rose, and as he bid his girl "good night," the master's thoughts returned to her great escape. Whereupon he kissed her thrice, instead of once, and said, for her ear alone, "Thank God! Thank God!" in an abrupt and brusque but very earnest fashion.

CHAPTER IX

CHILDE'S TOMB

MR. NORCOT found the life at Fox Tor Farm so much to his taste that he prolonged his visit, and sent the young man, Thomas Putt, with a message to his sister Gertrude at Chagford for more clothes. He felt secretly hopeful that each day was strengthening his position, and, indeed, by riding to the War Prison and seeing the Commandant on behalf of Cecil Stark, he won some thanks and a definite expression of gratitude from Grace Malherb.

"They have released him out of the cachot," said Peter. "Once more he labours at the place of worship, 'pride in his port, defiance in his eye.'"

Together the man and maid continued their excursions upon Dartmoor, and Grace enjoyed both to hear and to tell stories and legends of the ancient desert. Its romance found an echo in her youthful spirit and awoke new intellectual interests in her life. She soon learned the story of each lonely circle, uplifted monolith, and empty barrow from the age of stone: of every ruined cot or cross erected in times mediæval. Among these last, perhaps the most famous upon the Moor lay now within Malherb's own borders.

"Childe's Tomb" had met Grace's eyes when first she opened them upon a Dartmoor dawn. By a rivulet at the edge of Fox Tor Mire it stood, and she had gleaned its story and mourned the fate of the ancient hunter who fell there in winter tempest. Mr. Norcot, too, was familiar with the narrative, and since early boyhood he had gloated over its horrid details. Now he pretended but a misty recollection of the tale, so that he might listen to Grace.

The thing was in their eyes at the time, for they started on

horseback and rode past it. Beside the cross, Harvey Woodman, his son, Richard Beer, Thomas Putt, and another labourer were collected at a task. They worked upon each side of the little river that ran beside "Childe's Tomb," and levelled the banks to make a ford at a shallow point of the water. Here they talked together when aching backs required rest; and it happened that their master and his guest were the theme of the moment.

"I'll hold for Mister Peter," declared Putt. "He gived me a week's wages for going to Chaggyford; an' he told me just so friendly as you might, when he seed me bringing in trout, that a grasshopper was a killing bait at this time of year. Of course I know as much about grasshoppers as any man living; yet 'twas a very great condescension in him."

Uncle Smallridge made reply. He was now past work, but had walked from his distant cottage for the pleasure of a little conversation with familiars.

"'Tis the human nature in 'un that counts," he said. "You'll find as a general thing the best men ban't the easiest to get on with."

"Malherb's chock full o' human nature," declared Mr. Woodman.

"So full that he bursts wi' it—like a falling thunderbolt, till a man almost calls on the hill to cover him," admitted Putt.

"That's because you catched it for idleness," answered Woodman. "Mr. Narcot be like a machine oiled up to the last cog an' going so smooth an' suent that a child may turn the handle; an' maister's like a drashel* in clumsy hands—you don't know where 'twill fall next. But give me our man with all his faults an' fire."

"I'm afraid he'll try you sorely yet," foretold Smallridge, and little guessed how near the ordeal had come.

"I'll cleave to him so long as it holds with honesty," said Beer. "What mazes me is this: Mr. Peter never does nothing out of the common, nor never lapses from the level way of man with man, nor says a hard word to a fly; an' yet I doan't neighbour with him; an' t'other, despite his rages and crooked words and terrible rash goings on—as will damn your eyes for a look—why, I'd hold out for him against an army."

"'Tis his weakness draws you to him," said Uncle Smallridge. "I know. Us all likes to catch our betters tripping. It levels up

* *Drashel*: A flail.

the steep gulf that's fixed between master an' man, an' makes us more content with ourselves. You know how extra good t'other children get when one be extra naughty. This here Norcot is above us in his estate, an' that we can forgive, for us can't help it; but we'm never too comfortable or kindly towards them as be much above us in vartues."

"For my part, it don't seem natural," said Harvey Woodman. "I don't believe in these great flights of goodness in man or woman. Here and there a parson will stand out like a beacon on a hill, for 'tis his trade; but not them as lives to make money like Peter Norcot. When what shows in a man be so shining, I always ax myself about what don't show."

"'Tis your jealous spirit," said Putt.

"All the same, I don't care for a man as hides behind hisself like that wool-stapler do. The Devil's got his corner in him, same as he have in every mother's son of us."

"He may have cast him out, however," ventured Putt.

"Cast him out at five-an'-thirty years of age—an' him a bachelor! No fey."

"Well, he ban't bound to belittle hisself before the likes of us," said Putt.

"Here he be, anyway," added Beer, for Grace and Peter now approached.

She was finishing the tragic history of Childe as she rode beside him.

"And so the monks of Tavistock found the poor frozen gentleman where this cross now stands, and they took him away that he might be buried in their town, for under his last will and testament those who buried him were to possess all his estates. Others sought then to gain the body; but the good monks were too clever for them, and inherited the lands of Plymstock."

"Ah! 'they must rise betime, or rather not go to bed at all, that will overreach monks in matters of profit,' as Fuller observes."

"The people hereabout call it 'Childe's Tomb,' yet it can only be a cenotaph, if the story is true."

"The whole thing is a legend, be sure. We shall never know the real use of this cross," answered Peter.

"But might easily find a new one," said Mr. Kekewich, who walked beside Grace on his way to the workers. "Them step-

stones be just the very thing we're wanting to bridge the river here."

"Oh, Kek! how can you?" cried Grace.

"Pull down a cross? Tut, tut, iconoclast!" exclaimed Mr. Norcot.

"You may use wicked words, but stone be stone," answered the head man of Fox Tor Farm sulkily; "an' what was one way of marking a grave in the old time may very well stand for a bridge to-day. Look at they fools! What do they think they be doing?"

Woodman heard the question.

"We'm making a ford, and you'm the fool, not us," he replied stoutly.

"What did the master say? Tell me that," asked Kekewich.

"He said 'a bridge,' for I heard him," declared Norcot.

"Ess, he did, an' when he sez 'bridge' he don't mean 'ford'; an' when he sez 'steer' he don't mean 'heifer,' do he? A bridge has got to be builded. So the sooner you fetch gunpowder an' go 'pon the Moor to blast out a good slab of stone as'll go across here without a pier, the better."

"He don't always say what he mean, all the same," retorted Putt, who was in a fighting mood. "Yesterday he told me I was a pink-eyed rabbit, good for nought, an' this marning he called it back, an' said he was sorry he'd spoke it. That shows."

"That shows he can change his own mind; it don't show the likes of you can change it for him. Here he comes, anyway, an' what I say, I say: that thick cross-steps would make a very tidy bridge, an' save a week's work."

"You'd touch that cross!" gasped Smallridge. "You—a foreigner from Exeter!"

"Us have a right to it."

"No man have a right to a stone once 'tis fashioned into a cross; an' if you was a Christian 'stead of a crook-backed heathen, you'd know it; an' if a finger be laid against it, I'd not give a straw for the future of any man amongst us," cried Uncle Smallridge, rising to his feet in great agitation.

"Fright childer with your twaddle, not a growed-up soul," answered Kekewich. "But no call to shake your jaw an' bristle up your old mane like that. My word ban't law. Here the

master cometh, an' you'm like to hear more than will be stomachable when he sees what you've been doing."

"The fault was mine, and I'll take the blame," answered Richard Beer. "You men bide quiet an' let his anger fall upon me."

Grace and Norcot, not desiring to see the labourers' discomfiture, rode away, and a moment later Maurice Malherb arrived upon the scene. His strong face, scarred with passion uncontrolled, grew dark again now, and the kindly look vanished from his eyes as the customary storm-cloud of black eyebrow settled upon them.

"What are you doing? What means this digging?" he asked.

"'Tis me as done it, your honour," answered Beer. "I thought as a ford——"

"A ford! What business have you to dare to think? I said a bridge."

"The stone——"

"Look round you, you lazy rascal! Stone--stone—curse the stone! Scratch the ground anywhere, and it grins at you with its granite teeth! Let that bridge be finished by sundown or clear out, the whole pack of ye! A ford! And had I said 'ford' you would have built a bridge!"

Mr. Beer grew pale behind his beard, but did not reply, and Mr. Woodman also kept his temper and addressed his son.

"Go an' harness two bullocks to a truckamuck,"* he said, "an' you, Putt, slip up to the shed an' get some irons as you'll find there."

Then he turned to his master and spoke again—

"Us'll set to work this instant moment, your honour."

"That's well—by sundown, mind."

Malherb was riding off when old Smallridge addressed him, and the ancient man precipitated the very accident he feared.

"An' if it please you, your honour's goodness, I do pray as you won't let no hand touch this here holy tomb. Kekewich, as be grey enough to know better, have said that the stepstones would make a very tidy bridge an' save labour; but t'others tell me you never pay no heed to him, an' I hope your honour won't now."

The two old men glared at each other, and Malherb answered.

* *Truckamuck*: A sort of sledg.

What he heard was nearly true, but that he heard it from Uncle Smallridge instantly angered him. That the labourers should have perceived how Kekewich was ignored—that these hirelings should note their master's indifference to the wisdom of his servitor—again awoke Malherb's temper.

"They say I don't heed Kekewich? Then they lie. Kek's little finger holds more sense than all their stupid heads together."

Whereon Mr. Kekewich shone around him as the sun emerging from a cloud.

"That cross there—good wrought stone wasted," he explained.

"They steps might have been made for the bridge we want. So I told 'em; an' all they did was to show the whites of their silly eyes."

The master reflected but a moment; then he issued a command. He spoke in the name of reason—a favourite expedient with the unreasonable.

"Good practical sense. Now we'll see if I run counter to Kekewich. He's right and you're wrong. Here are stones lying useless on my land, and I want even such for a purpose. Reason points to them, and I will use them. Pull down that cross and build my bridge."

"I'd rather take other stones and chance the extra work," said Richard Beer uneasily.

"Pull down that pile there and build my bridge before night-fall, or go your way—all of you," repeated Malherb. Then he departed and left the workers to make decision.

"An' the cross itself, if us knocks off one arm, will be just what we want for the pigs' house!" cried Kekewich triumphantly.

"For God's love throw down your tools and come away!" begged Smallridge, his ancient voice rising into a scream. "Turn your backs upon this place before it's too late."

"Hop off! Hop off an' creak somewhere else, you old raven!" replied Kek indignantly. "Let these men use their brains without your bleating. Ban't I old too? 'Tis vain growing old unless you grow artful with it. If they have got their intellects, they won't mind you."

"Nor you—you limb of the Devil," groaned Smallridge. "You—with his pitchfork in your forehead. I wish to God I'd never heard tell of you."

Kekewich turned from him to Harvey Woodman and the rest.

"'Tis up ten o'clock," he said, "an' you strong men in the prime of life have got to decide what you'll do about it, not this tootling old mumphead here. Use your sense an' say whether you'll look for a new master an' mistress an' seven shilling a week, or bide here with better money an' corn an' cider an' all the fatness of the earth. I'll speak no word; only I might remind you, Beer, an' you, Woodman, that you've got wives—that's all."

"Then 'tis for us to decide," said Woodman solemnly—"us four: me, Beer, Putt, and you, Mark Bickford. Here us stands. Now you have your tell first, Thomas Putt, 'cause you'm the youngest."

"I'm a poor tool for such a job, an' I shan't say nothing," answered Putt. "I'll abide by what you men do."

"So much for you then," said Woodman. "Us knows you haven't got more sense than, please God, you should have, yet 'tis a question whether you did ought to let another man keep your conscience. Now, Bickford, what's your view?"

Mr. Bickford, a man of colourless mind in the affairs of life, showed sudden and unexpected strength of purpose.

"I guess I'll bide an' pull the cross down," he said. "Master do clapper-claw a bit, but he pays me eight shilling a week; an' where I gets such money as that 'tis my duty to stop. You may squeak," he added to Uncle Smallridge, who uttered an inarticulate exclamation of misery at his decision, "but I be keeping company; an' I also be keeping my old bed-lying mother out o' the poorhouse. An' I'd pull down fifty crosses afore I'd lose eight shilling a week. If there's a mischief in it, ban't of my brewing."

"Well, then, 'tis for me an' you, Harvey," proceeded Richard Beer. "As I'm the older man, I'll come last an' wind up on it when you've spoke your mind."

"A man like me with a wife an' son be in the worse fix of all," declared Woodman moodily. "If evil follows, I may be twisting a scourge for the next generation, whereas you that be childless can only catch it in your own case an' Dinah's. Still, to go back to peat-cutting after Fox Tor Farm is a great fall."

"The Devil's tempting you, Harvey!" cried Mr. Smallridge.

"Shut your mouth, or I'll hit 'e on it!" retorted Kekewich savagely. "Leave 'em to fight it out. They've got to do their duty, an' I'd like to know whenever the A'mighty punished any man for doing that?"

"There's my duty to my master an' my duty to my conscience. 'Tis our duty to our master to do what he pays us to do; and us be paid to work, not to think," argued Woodman.

"If evil's to be hatched, us won't catch it," declared Bickford. "When a man sets a rick on light, ban't the flint an' steel they has up for arsony, but the chap hisself. We'm no more than the flint an' steel in this matter."

"We've got immortal parts, however," argued Beer. "We may hide our bodies behind another chap; but can us hide our souls? What I want to know is the nature of the harm we'll do. Wh' 's the name of it?"

"'Tis insulting the Lord of Hosts," said Uncle Smallridge tremulously.

"Gammon!" answered Kekewich. "'Tis obeying them as the Lord have set in authority over you. We've got to do with a dead stone; an' the chap who be buried here found his way to heaven or hell long afore the Lord, in a weak moment, let your parents get a fool like you."

"'Tis the shape that shakes us, not the stone," explained Woodman; "an' I wish you'd decide an' have done with it, Richard Beer. We are ready to go by you, for 'tis well knowed that you've a conscience as works so active as your skin in harvest time."

"Well," replied Beer, "I can't see no flaw in what Bickford said. My conscience is allowed pretty peart, I believe; an' it don't give me a twinge in this matter; though I'd much rather not do it all the same."

"Suppose the lightning struck us," suggested Putt, and Beer scanned the sky.

"Can't without a Bible miracle; an', good or bad, the size of this job be too small for that. What harm falls will most surely fall 'pon master, not us."

"If I thought Miss Grace would suffer, I'd see the stone rot to dust afore I'd touch it," declared Putt.

"Whether or no, we've got to pull down Childe's Tomb, an' make a bridge; an' my conscience, an' my wages, an' my common sense all point the same way, so here goes," summed up Mr. Beer.

"I'm with you," said Bickford

"An' me too," added Putt; "an' come Judgment Day, it

there's a sharp word said to me, I shall name your name, Dick Beer."

"An' you, Harvey?"

For answer Mr. Woodman turned to the sledge that his son had brought up. From this he took a rope and some long irons.

"Come on! Let's get it over. Once the cross be down, our minds will grow easier. 'Tis the shape, I tell you, as makes us so weak for a moment."

"God forgive you, souls!" cried Smallridge: "an' mind, when you'm wading waist-deep in trouble, that it weren't no fault of mine. Bide till I be out of sight, that's all. Then you an' this here crooked old Apollyon can go to your wicked work."

He looked at Kekewich, shook his head at the doomed monument, and hobbled away as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Us had better all spit over our left shoulder, for luck," said Mr. Beer; "then we can begin. An' see that all four of us hang upon the rope together, so as the work an' the pay be equally divided."

Harvey Woodman's young son prepare'd to give assistance, but his father roughly bade him begone.

"You drop that rope an' get up to the farm to your mother," he said. "She'll find you a job. Us don't want you to-day."

CHAPTER X

THE FIRSTBORN

THE destruction of Childe's Tomb awoke no protest upon the county-side, for antiquaries had not yet turned their attention to the interesting and obscure relics of former ages scattered over Dartmoor. A few intelligent men mourned that another mediæval landmark had been sacrificed to the advance of civilisation; then the matter was forgotten, save at Fox Tor Farm, where great unrest still reigned among the workers.

The women exhibited chief concern; but while Annabel and Grace Malherb showed sentimental regret and the master laughed at them for their folly, Dinah Beer and Mary Woodman took a far more serious view of the incident, and reduced their husbands to the extremity of uneasiness. They foretold disaster upon all concerned; Mr. Kekewich they specially tormented, and declared that, as arch instigator of the outrage, upon him the first grief must fall. He cared nothing; but Richard, Harvey, and others went in growing fear. They longed for weeks and months to pass that they might be removed by time from the hour of their evil deed; then, as each uneventful day dwindled and each night passed by, they drew a little nearer toward peace of mind. After a month had passed they plucked up spirit and faced the unseen with steadier gaze.

"Another week gone an' nothing said," whispered Putt one morning to Harvey Woodman, where they worked at wall-building. He glanced sideways up to heaven as he spoke with a gesture of suspicion.

"No—the world goes on very easy. What did Peter Norcot give 'e for taking the pack-horse with his leather boxes back to Chaggyford?"

"There again—good luck surely. A crown I got by it; an' I ate my meat with Mason's mother an' sister who live there. Mason be Mr. Norcot's man, and his sister is called Tryphena. An' I be going over again, for she said, when I axed her, that pinky rims to the eyes didn't stand against a chap in her judgment. She thought 'twas a beauty, if anything. Her be a few year older'n me; but that often works very well, an' keeps down the family."

"You'd best to be careful, all the same," said Woodman. "The woman as you meets half-way, often makes you go t'other half afore you think you've started."

"I won't hear no word against that female from you or any man," declared Thomas Putt, growing very red.

"From me you certainly won't, seeing as I never heard tell of her afore this minute," replied Woodman calmly. "Only, as a married man, I say go slow. When a girl tells you such eyes as you'n be beautiful, she's getting to that state of mind when they put a home of their own afore truth and common sense an' everything."

Putt was about to answer rather warmly when Richard Beer appeared. His beard blew about him; his eyes were sunk into his head, and dull care stared from them.

"It's come!" he said. "I've held my peace these twenty-four hours; an' longer I will not. The ill luck have set in! There's no more doubt about it."

"Have it hit you?" asked Putt, his anger vanishing; "because if so, us ban't safe neither."

"Not directly. It strikes the farm. There's scores o' dozens o' moles in the meadow; and the rats have come to the pig-styes in an army."

"They be natural things," declared Putt. "You might expect 'em. Where there's pigs there's rats."

"Yes, but not like a plague. They've come up in a night, same as them frogs in Egypt."

"You'm down-daunted about nought," answered Woodman. "Read what some of they Bible heroes had to suffer. There's nought like dipping into the prophet Job when you'm out of heart with your luck. 'Twill make you very contented. My gran'father always read Job slap through after he'd had a row wi' the Duchy."

"As for me, I shall bide wi' the man so long as he can pay wages," said Putt.

They passed to their work ; and elsewhere Maurice Malherb, not ignorant of the verminous inroad upon fields and styes, was debating whether he should sink his pride and summon Leaman Cloberry. But while time passed by and he hesitated, there came a post and tidings so momentous that the rats and moles were forgotten.

Now, indeed, did trouble like an armed man break in on Fox Tor Farm ; the light of the Malherbs vanished, and their hope set in lasting sorrow. Noel Malherb, serving under Sir Rowland Hill, with the right of Lord Wellington's army in the Peninsula, had fallen before Vittoria.

Annabel and her daughter took this grief into secrecy, and were hidden from the world through many weeks ; Malherb fought it down, and concealed his emotion from all eyes. He laughed not less seldom, he fell into anger more often than of yore.

"Pharaoh cracked his heart when his first was took," said Woodman to Kekewich ; "but this man——"

"His heart's hid in his breast, not open to your eye," answered the other. "His heart be cracked all right, though he don't come to us an' say so. But I know—by the voice of 'un, an' the long, lonely rides he takes all about nothing, an' his look when he stares at his darter—a miser's eyes—same as that old mully-grub Lovey Lee when she claws a bit of money."

"'Childe's Tomb' have done its work—Uncle Smallridge didn't lie."

"Seeing as this poor young gentleman was shot down and dust in his grave weeks an' weeks afore we touched the cursed cross—for I heard master say so—you'll allow you're talking foolishness."

"The Lord can work backwards so easy as he can work forwards. Miss Grace will be the next, you mark me."

"Norcot'll have her come presently," said Kekewich. "She've got to wipe her mother's tears for the present. This here cruel come-along-of-it have cut ten years off the life of Missis."

The ancient spoke truth, for Annabel Malherb's sufferings under her great trial proved terrible. They were more objective than her husband's. The family and the race were nothing to

her : she only knew that a French bullet had taken the life of her firstborn, and she would never look into his brown eyes again or put her cheek against his. Even her boy's beloved dust was buried within the hecatombs of Spain, and her tears would never fall upon his grave. But Malherb, beside this present misfortune of his son's sacrifice for the country, had a deeper and more lasting pang of ambition blighted and hope for ever dead. He had toiled in vain ; he had lifted this stout dwelling as a heritage for none. Presently his daughter would wed with Norcot, and no young eyes of his own race would see the larches and Scotch firs of his planting grow into trees ; no heir would note the ebony and golden lichens write dignity and age upon his roof of slate, nor see the mosses mellow his granite walls. Aliens must follow and the name of Malherb would vanish, like the fragrant memory of last year's fern.

Then, within six weeks of the ill tidings, a great conceit suddenly flashed upon Malherb ; and as the Witch of Endor called forth that awful shade of Samuel to her own admiration, so did this man raise the unexpected spirit of a thought. Suddenly, amidst the mean and familiar imaginings of life, uprising like a giant from among the dwarfish throng of practical and common notions, there stalked tremendous an Idea ; and he stood astonished before it, appraised its magnitude and welcomed it for an inspiration from the Gods.

This fancy came to Malherb as he pursued the prosaic business of casting figures : and he threw down his pen, picked up his hat, and hastened into the little walled garden of the farm to find his wife. He longed to tell of this message that seemed to point to peace ; but his impatience was not set at rest for the space of hours. Mrs. Malherb had ridden out on a pillion behind Mr. Beer, and Dinah could say nothing of their destination.

Irritated at the accident, Maurice himself strode on to the Moor, and proceeded towards Fox Tor, that he might note his wife returning and reach her as quickly as possible.

His way took him past a favourite haunt of his daughter's, and when he reached the broken stonework of the ter, Malherb surprised Grace in serious conversation with a young man.

The girl had gone out alone to pass her summer hours with mournful thoughts. The horizon of her life was clouded now, and already sorrow in the present and cares for the future robbed

her young days of their former contentment. Her heart was warm—a delicious empty chamber that awaiteth one as yet unknown. Beyond the dark grief of her brother's death, another now lurked, and Time, that should have dawdled with her in these rosy hours of youth, while yet her heart had never throbbed to one loved name, raced fast and pitiless as the east wind. Down his closing avenues, outlined immediately ahead, stood one at the horizon of her life, appeared a man as the goal and crown of her maiden race. There beamed the neat, trim, and amiable apparition of Mr. Peter Norcot. It was no precocity that forced poor Grace into thinking so much of love, while yet she knew it not: but in her esteem, love and marriage embraced the same idea, and now she marvelled mutely to find not love, but a very active aversion reigning in her mind against the wool-stapler. Her father's attitude and repeated assurances that wed with Peter she must, had thus thrown her thoughts upon the affairs of womenkind, herself not yet a woman. But love haunted her, and wonder concerning it. The chance young squire, who visited Fox Tor Farm, had been fluttered to his green heart's core could he have seen what was in Grace's mind or behind her drooping lids. With interest she regarded the better looking amongst her father's visitors, wondered who loved them beside their mothers, speculated as to what would happen if some sudden, invisible spark flashed from their bosoms and found fuel within her own.

One friend she had, and he was a boy even as she was a girl. John Lee belonged to the people, yet he revealed a different mien from them. The common speech was upon his tongue, the common clothes of earth-colour hid his shapely form; yet he had a way of speaking the one and wearing the other that set a mark of distinction upon him. This lad possessed more imagination than diligence; he knew the Moor with a different knowledge to that of Beer, or Woodman, or Leaman Cloberry. He had garnered its legends and its mysteries. He understood something of the spirit of the eternal hills; he loved

"Their colours and their rainbows and their clouds,
And their fierce winds and desolate liberty."

He could read, and owned a book or two hidden in the hay-loft where he dwelt outside his grandmother's cottage. He called the plants by their local names, and was skilled in the lore of wild things and the weather.

Grace found him very agreeable company and, upon first mentioning at home that she sometimes met and spoke with him, her father did not take it amiss.

"Get the boy to tell you where that old demon on the hill has hidden my amphora," he said.

"As if he knew!" murmured Mrs. Malherb, who was a woman of literal mind.

"The boy doubtless knows nothing," her husband answered; "but 'tis within the bounds of possibility that he might find out."

Henceforward Grace, holding herself at liberty to do so, often met John Lee and often made appointments to meet him. He taught her Dartmoor; he rode his pony by her side and gloried in the manifold virtues of her new hunter, the great and gallant 'Cæsar.'

While Peter Norcot was at Fox Tor Farm, young John kept clear of it. Indeed, he had plenty of work when he chose to work, and toiled by fits and starts at peat-cutting, lichen-gathering, or attending upon some military sportsman from the War Prison. But his desire and ambition at eighteen years of age was to win employment in the kennels of Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt. From such a position, if blessed by good luck, he trusted some day to rise and become a whipper-in. Of any higher destiny he did not dream. To be huntsman was a position in life that rose almost as much above his hopes as to be Master.

Now, some while before Maurice Malherb had entered on to the Moor, so that he might see and meet his wife returning home, John Lee, walking near a spot very well known to him as one of Grace's favourite haunts, found her there where the grass made pleasant cushions amid the granite boulders upon the southern slope of Fox Tor; where the music of a little waterfall rose and fell softly at the pleasure of the wind; and where the Beam's mighty shoulders basked under the sun and took a tremulousness of outline in the hot air which arose from off them.

Rising suddenly out of the hollows where the streamlet ran, John Lee appeared within thirty yards of Grace, and, to his dismay and concern, discovered that she wept. Some coincidence of thought with the solemn natural things about her; some clash or chime of sadness at the spectacle of her future and the vast and featureless mountain uplifted before her eyes, struck the emotional chord that loosens tears, and Grace suffered them to

flow and carry away a little of her sorrow in the glittering drops. She was young, and hope her proper heritage, therefore she grew happier presently, and when the miser's grandson appeared, hesitated, and, with a rueful countenance, began to creep away, she called to him and bade him come.

"I'm only crying, John Lee. Hast never seen a girl cry before?"

He advanced upon this, and his handsome young face was all blushes.

"Never, Miss Grace; an' never want to. I would I could take your trouble on my own shoulders."

"Your grandmother never weeps?"

"Not she. A granite wall sweats more moisture than her eyes fall tears. But you—— The young gentleman, your brother, died like a hero. 'Tis a great and noble thing to be a hero."

"How can a word stand for his dear beautiful face and bright eyes and kind voice? Never a maid had such a brother as Noel. Hero! Hero!" She lifted her voice bitterly. "An empty-handed, senseless sound to take the place of a dear brother. Not one pang does it lessen—no, not even in my father's heart, though he says the syllables over and over again, like a parrot. Our hope and our glory gone—that is what his death means."

"I can't say nothing—I wish I could. I'd go and die to-morrow if 'twould bring him back," declared John earnestly. "You'll think 'tis easy to tell such things, but God's my Judge, I mean it."

"You are not unlike him in a way, John. He had your manner of holding up his neck, and your mouth and your neat ears."

"I'm an awful fuzz-poll—like they curly-haired coloured men at the War Prison."

She did not answer for a moment, then spoke again of her sorrows.

"My heart's an empty nest now—all my plans to live with Noel for ever and love his children are broken down. And I had a secret hope that he"—she stopped, then decided to finish the sentence—"that he might soften my father."

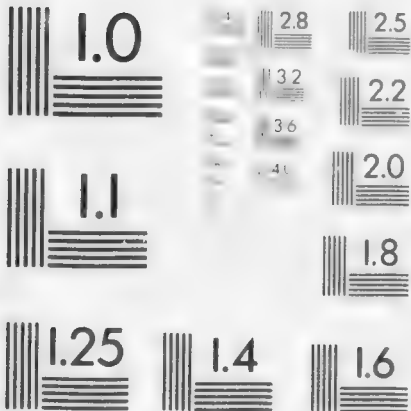
"Your father be stern enough, but not to you—sure never to you."

He spoke with conviction and Grace did not reply. A black-



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



APPLIED IMAGE Inc.

300 N. ZEEB RD.
ANN ARBOR, MI 48106
(313) 761-1000

and-orange humble bee was working in the wild thyme at her feet. It tumbled and laboured from cluster to cluster of the flowers, pulled each tiny purple corolla to itself and dipped into each for the stores there hidden. It droned hither and thither, full of business, and at last, lifting itself heavily, flew away with a cheerful boom of thanksgiving. So near Grace's ear did it go, that she started, and Lee, though grave enough at heart, laughed.

"He won't hurt 'e. They bumbles have no spears, I believe—anyway they never use 'em."

"I hate Peter Norcot!" she said aloud, suddenly, and with such vehemence that John started and stared.

"I hate him.—hate—hate—hate him! Hark at the echo. I've told the echo that many a time. And the echo always answers very wisely, 'Hate him!'"

"What have you got against him, if I may ax?"

"Nothing; and that's everything. He's perfect."

"An' do love your very shadow, so they say."

"I forgot that. There is reason enough for not liking him."

"Then you'll have to hate every man on the Moor. They all love you—even I dare to do it."

"Love me?"

"Ess fay! Be it uncivil in me to say so, Miss?"

"I should think it was, indeed!"

"Truth's truth. I can't help it. Never seed nothing like you. I'd go to the end of the world for you. I wish 'twas my happy lot to be your servant."

"Would you kill Mr. Norcot for me?"

He was silent; then he nodded.

"Well, John Lee, I had sooner you loved me than Mr. Norcot should."

"Don't say it even in fun. You don't know what it means to me. I'm up eighteen year old now—a man. But I hate Mr. Peter, too, for that matter."

"Because I do?"

"Yes, an' for another reason: because granny likes him. He gived her money once. She said afterwards that there was that in his face pleased her fancy, for he'd got a depth in it that would make rocks and water do his will."

"She's quite wrong there. He's a most superficial man and amiable to weakness. He is always making feeble jests and

quoting the poets. He is a thing of shreds and patches. He put your grandmother into an old verse once. I laughed, though I hate him. He said:—

“Through regions by wild men and cannibals haunted,
Old Dame Lovey Lee goes alone and undaunted;
But, bless you, the risk's not so great as it's reckoned;
She's too plain for the first and too tough for the second!”

“He may laugh at her,” replied John Lee. “But she don't laugh at him. When he'd gone that day, she told me that he was the first man ever she clapped eyes on as could be her master if he liked, and I shivered to hear her say it.”

“He's welcome to be her master; he never shall be mine,” said Grace resolutely; and as she spoke, her father suddenly appeared before them.

CHAPTER XI

MALHERB'S IDEA

JOHN LEE touched his hat, while Grace rose and welcomed her father, who, still dominated by his Idea, proved in a very amiable mood.

"You grow fast—you'll be as tall as your grandmother at this rate. Not that you are like her," he said to the lad.

John smiled and touched his hat again.

Malherb scanned the finely built youngster, and thought of his dead son. There was a resemblance, as Grace recently remarked to John himself, and the father, who had a picture of Noel Malherb painted lifelike upon memory, now perceived this similitude. For a moment he stared in silence, then turned to Grace.

"I seek your mother. Has she gone to visit Lady Tyrwhitt?"

"Yes, she is at Tor Royal, father. Indeed, she should be on her way home again by this time."

"Then we'll walk along to meet her. And you, John Lee, tell that old witch up there I'm not asleep. I shall have my amphora yet; and the reckoning, when it does come, will mean a halter for her."

"Your servant, sir; an' I'll be sure to speak the message."

As they proceeded together, Grace put a petition to her father, and he was about to decline it, but bethought him. The Idea entirely turned upon Grace herself, and he had no desire to cross her will in minor matters, though she still differed from him upon the great question of her own future.

"Father," she said, "I ought to have a groom."

"Why, that boy we have left is as good as a groom to you."

"In a way. But I feel there should be a little more distinction about the matter. In truth, John Lee's pony can't live with my beautiful 'Cæsar'; and if he was better mounted he could show

me the country that you and I are going to hunt in the winter. 'Twould be well for me to ride over it, and you are too busy to take me. Now Lee, if he had a horse and a livery—and how wonderfully well he rides."

"That's true. I had observed it. Better far than any man I have seen on the Moor—excepting Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt and myself. A splendid natural seat."

"Let him be my servant and look after your hacks and the hunters. But only if you can afford it. I know you have had to spend a great deal lately."

"Yes, yes: we must spend to get; and Dartmoor wants a good deal of cash down in advance on a bargain. But I think I generally get the worth of my money. Well—he shall come. I like a livery or two about me, and poor Kekewich will never cut much of a figure in his. The boy is a fine up-standing boy, and civil. You shall have him. He may help me too—in the direction of the Malherb amphora."

"Thank you, thank you! Was there ever such a kind father?"

"I've only got you now," he said. "I'm not a talker, and it is a vile thing to see a man of quality show his feelings; but between father and daughter affection is natural, and may even be declared in reason. You're the apple of my eye."

"How well I know it!"

She kissed him and, occupied with his Idea, he took her hand. Thus they walked along until Mrs. Malherb appeared on her homeward way from Tor Royal. She sat behind Richard Beer on a pillion, for she was fearful of horses, and never rode alone.

Annabel described an *émeute* at the War Prison.

"It seems," she said, "that the poor Americans are the chief danger there. They were sent up from the hulks at Plymouth, because they were always escaping from them; and now more than one has got clean away in a disturbance. They think that these desperate men will presently be recaptured, or else lose their lives in the lonely desert wastes towards Cranmere Pool. They may, however, by good fortune get into touch with their fellow-countrymen on parole at Ashburton or Tavistock, and so make to the coast and escape to France from Dartmouth or Tor Quay."

"If I should meet a runaway!" cried Grace.

"You would ride him down, I should hope, unless he yielded and followed you," said her father.

Mrs. Malherb nearly dropped Richard's pillion-belt and fell to the ground.

"La! what sport for a young maid!" she cried.

That night after they had gone to rest, the master placed his great inspiration before Annabel, and her eyes grew round in the darkness. The blind was up, for Malherb allowed the daylight to waken him, and the seasons regulated the hour of his rising. Now Mrs. Malherb watched a star cross the eastern-facing casement; but only her eyes perceived that distant sun, for her mind was occupied with a closer matter.

"I have hit upon a thought which shows how I may still work to some purpose here and not make a place for strangers to enjoy when we are gone," he said. "A Malherb shall have all——"

"You cannot mean that you will forgive your nephews!" cried his wife in amazement.

"'Nephews'! No. Curse the pack of 'em—curs that disgrace the name. They're not even honest. And 'twas not I that quarrelled with them, but they with me. I am fifty-one. In a year I shall be fifty-two, and Grace will be marriageable. Eighteen's a very proper age. My grand-aunt, Sibella, was a famous beauty at sixteen, wedded with the Duke of Sampford on her seventeenth birthday, had a daughter upon her eighteenth, and was a grandmother when she was thirty-seven. By the time Grace is nineteen she will be the mother of a son."

"Good gracious, my love, how you run on!"

"Not at all. I'm simply stating the probable course of nature. A son, I say; and that son comes to us. When the lad is one-and-twenty I shall be but seventy or so. What is that? Nowadays, such a man as I am is merely middle-aged at seventy. We have the lad for our own. He must be given to us. By God, it shall be a condition of the match! And he shall be called Malherb, and shall found a line of 'em here instead of my boy, who is dead and gone. 'Tis but a jump of a generation."

The stars at the window laughed in their courses and tumbled before Mrs. Malherb's eyes. Her husband abounded in fantastic projects, but this scheme was egregious even for him. She felt the futility of it, not the humour. One objection specially beat upon her mother's heart, and that she uttered—

"You couldn't expect Grace to give up her first baby, my dear."

"Why not? Why not? Not to me? Not to her own father? Slife! Who should be better able than I to make a man of a young fellow? He would be my personal companion. He would be brought up from the cradle with this place in his eyes. He would understand that he was a Malherb and all that that means. 'Tis a very proper idea and, if the girl's not a fool, she'll be the first to see it. Whether she sees it or not, however, don't matter a button."

"For God's sake say no such thing to her!"

"Am I likely to? Do credit me with some understanding. All the same, it will have to be. My heart's on it. The high traditions of the family—Norcot will assent readily, I have little doubt. I can twist him round my finger."

"I fear Grace cares less and less for him."

"I know better. Even you will allow me some knowledge of human nature. Her indifference is assumed. She is deeply interested in him."

"Deeply interested? Yes; in how to escape him."

"Be that as it may, within six weeks of her eighteenth birthday she'll be Mrs. Peter Norcot; and her son will be called Maurice Malherb and come hither as soon as he is weaned. If ever I meant anything in my life, I mean that."

"The way you order human destinies!"

"It is the province of the strong man so to do," he answered calmly. "My son cannot fill my shoes, because he has fallen for his country; but my grandson can and shall. The rest of them may be Norcot's; the first is mine."

"To count your grandchildren before they are born!" murmured Mrs. Malherb.

"No such thing at all. Go to sleep, and don't be foolish. I do not count them. That is Heaven's work. I merely reserve the eldest to myself. The action may not be usual, but that weighs very little with me. I speak in a spirit both scientific and religious; and it shall be so, if the Devil himself said 'No!' so there's an end on it."

He turned over, and in ten minutes snored; but for long hours Annabel watched the twinkling sky, and marvelled as to what manner of planet reigned in heaven and lighted earth at the moment when her husband first drew breath.

BOOK II
THE SEVEN

CHAPTER I

MR. BLAZEY

AT the War Prison, in a crisis now rapidly approaching, it was destined that the young man, Cecil Stark, should assume sudden prominence. Thousands of French and American prisoners were confined at Prince Town during this period; and with the latter were herded a company of coloured men who had been captured in the enemy's battleships or privateers. Bitterly was this circumstance resented by the Americans; but, worse than their slaves they found the presence of some seven hundred French, who shared the granite hospitality of Prison No. 4. These poor tatterdemalions had added to their necessary griefs by personal folly. They had gamed away their very shoes and blankets; and they were thrust hither by the hundred, and kept alive, like cattle, with scarcely a rag to cover their nakedness.

Many times the Americans protested with indignation against this wrong, and implored that these forlorn French might be removed from amongst them. But months elapsed before their reasonable complaints were heard, and the baser sort of soldier guards was wont to laugh and ask the Americans wherein their own fantastic and ridiculous habiliments presented a better appearance than the Frenchmen's skins.

Stark and certain of his companions were thus challenged on a day in autumn as they patrolled together along the exercise yard. Beside him walked Commodore Jonathan Miller, who had commanded the United States frigate *Marblehead* when she was taken, while behind them followed one William Burnham, a junior officer on the same vessel, and James Knapps, sometime boatswain of the *Marblehead*. These four men, together with three others presently to be mentioned, formed a little community of friend-

ship, and had entered into a compact to share their means, and make common cause against the hardships that encompassed them. They were known as "the Seven" and their companions held them in high esteem, for it happened that Stark was among the fortunate and obtained regular advances from home. With his money he did no little good, and not the Seven only, but many more who suffered from poverty or disease, had found him a willing friend.

A sentry perched before his box on the prison wall heard Stark grumble to William Burnham and made a jesting remark.

"Don't the Frenchmen's skins fit 'em as well as your clothes fit you?" he said.

Whereupon Burnham, a mere lad with red hair and a round freckled face, made such a fiery retort that the soldier scowled and fingered his musket.

"You ask that—you coarse-hearted lout? Their skins don't fit 'em. Count their ribs; look at the bones sticking out of their elbows and ankles. No prisoner's skin can fit him in this cursed country, for you starve us; your agents rob us; you strip your scarecrows to clothe us!"

They passed on, and Commodore Miller spoke.

"The Americans are treated better elsewhere, however," he remarked. "At Chatham, and at Stapleton too, they receive more considerate attention. There, at least, they obtain what the British Government is pleased to give them."

"And the markets shut agin us—that's consarned robbery," said James Knapps. "'Tis the loss of the market that angers me most past bearing."

"A very great injustice," answered Miller sadly. "It cannot be known. The French are permitted to trade with the people of the country. Farmers and farmers' wives are admitted into the great court and they barter regularly there. But we can only get our cheese, or butter, or eggs for our sick folk through the French, and they charge five-and-twenty per centum above the market prices."

"So we are robbed every way," said Knapps. He was a powerful, middle-aged man, of genial aspect and ordinary appearance; but another American who now approached and walked beside his friends, discovered a countenance that had called for second glances in any company. He was tall, extraordinarily thin

and very high-shouldered. His eyes were of the palest grey, his high cheek-bones seemed nearly thrusting through the skin. He was almost bald, and his woollen cap came down over his ears. A flat nose and a fan shaped tuft of hair upon his chin completed the man's physiognomy; and much bitterness usually sat upon these strange features.

"What say you, Leverett?" asked Stark of the new-comer.

David Leverett, who had been a carpenter on the *Marblehead*, and lost one hand in the engagement which ended that vessel's career, waved his stump to the sky.

"I say 'tis small wonder that some on us enlist in the King's service, damn his eyes! It's their dirty, devilish game ter make us. They torture us and starve us and freeze us, till narry a one but would Judas his own mother, if 'twas only for the sight of salt water again."

Cecil Stark nodded.

"That is what they mean, sure enough. Another batch came up yesterday from the *Hector* prison ship. Many, they say, have gone into the King's service."

"'Tis the refinement of cruelty to make a man turn against his motherland," mused Miller; "yet there were a few good Englishmen on the *Marblehead*."

"Then there's Blaze," continued Mr. Leverett, who seldom opened his mouth save to utter a grievance. "Call him an Agent! One of the carved stone turrets we are going ter fix on the church tower would be a better agent than him. I wish I had the handling of the skunk."

"Lordy! Have done with your growling," said Knapps. "What's the use of it? You only drive other hot-heads into the enemy's ships. I miss faces every day as it is."

"Many are true enough," replied young Burnham. "There's Mercer and Troubridge and our messmate, Caleb Carberry. You miss them because they are all sick in hospital."

"Troubridge is dead," said Cecil Stark shortly; "and Matthew Mercer is dying. I saw the doctor this morning. He said 'twas all over with him. He's unconscious."

Leverett lifted his ribs in a deep sigh.

"They are out of it. I most envy 'em. There's no escape from this cussed bowery except by way of the 'orspital."

None spoke; then upon their gloomy silence a black man

burst, in the very extremity of excitement. He was a big, full-blooded negro—a splendid specimen of vigour, manhood and health. Now he waved his arms and rolled his great brown eyes and advanced upon them with a clumsy saltation.

“Waal, now, look at that black imp!” cried Knapps. “Come here, Sam Cuffee! What’s happened to you? Has anybody left you a fortune, or a pair of wings?”

“Better dan dat, Jimmy Knapps! Good tings for all ob us, please de Lord. Him coming, Sars. Ha, ha, ha! Him coming!”

“Who’s coming?” asked Leverett. “The Lord? Don’t you think it, Sam. There’s no God nowadays ter keep his weather eye lifting on the likes of us.”

“’Tis vain to whine so, David Leverett,” said Stark angrily. “I’m weary of your eternal grumbling. If you chose fighting for your business in life, you should expect hard knocks. You went to be carpenter in a ship of war, and——”

Here a shout from Burnham interrupted the speaker, for Mr. Cuffee had told his great news to the other officers.

“Yes, Sar—honour bright, Sar. Marse Jones, de turnkey, he tell me. Marse Blazey—him coming to put all right dis berry day, so I done run to tell you.”

“Then you can call back your words, carpenter,” said Commodore Miller. “There’s a God yet—only He takes His own time—not ours.”

“Blazey coming!” cried Knapps. “’Tis most too good to be true. Some on you gentlemen had best think what to say to him.”

As he spoke, Captain Cottrell, Commandant of the War Prison, appeared and advanced with a guard into the midst of the patrol ground. A trumpeter blew a blast to summon the wandering throngs, and when they had crowded in a dense circle round him, the Commandant raised his voice and made a statement from the midst of the bristling bayonets that hemmed him about.

“I have to inform you, gentlemen, that your Agent, Mr. Blazey, from Plymouth, will visit Prison No. 4 at three o’clock of the afternoon to-day. Here in public he will meet you and hear all your grievances, but there must be no private intercourse.”

He departed, and the Americans, with joy upon their faces,

raised a cheer—not for Captain Cottrell, but his news. The black men, who were grouped together apart, also lifted a shout of satisfaction.

"One might think that peace was proclaimed rather than that a paid official is merely about to do his duty," said Cecil Stark with bitterness.

But Commodore Miller shook his head.

"Do not even assume so much, my lad. This man—well, a sluggard in duty can never be trusted. If he discharges his task reluctantly, he may also discharge it ill."

Great stir and bustle marked the next few hours. Light and air were let into every dark corner; broken hammocks were patched, and each granite ward was cleansed. Only the prisoners themselves remained unchanged. No power could instantly alter their thin, hungry faces or their disgraceful attire.

There came presently to Cecil Stark his friend and superior officer, the Commodore.

"As one not quite unknown to them, they have called upon me to be spokesman," he said.

"Of course, sir; you're the first man amongst us. Every American knows that."

"But I've no gift of words, Stark, and my nerve is not what it was. I declined the task; whereon they invited me to name a speaker likely to address this Blazezy with force and judgment. I come to you. I hold it to be your duty. You must not shrink from it."

Cecil Stark was much taken aback by this proposal.

"Think better of it, sir. Who am I to voice so many older and wiser men than myself?"

"I wish you to do so. We must say much in little and hold the Agent's attention. Be off now and collect your thoughts and set your ideas in order," said the Commodore. "Look to it that you justify my choice, for I shall bear the blame if you fail."

"Tis a very great responsibility, but I'll assume it, since you command, Commodore. Now let me meet the leaders."

After a brief conference with the prominent prisoners, Stark vanished and, until the important person named Reuben Blazezy arrived at Prince Town, he secluded himself with certain papers and prison orders, that he might prepare his speech.

Then, towards evening, a trumpet announced the arrival of the

Agent; the captives drew up in a dense double line, and Mr. Blazey, with his staff and a guard of red-coats, appeared. He was a short, stout man, clad in plum-colour, with a face of generous purple that matched his clothes. His little black eyes shot sharp glances everywhere as he advanced, hat in hand; his clean-shaven mouth was of a coarse pattern, yet it lacked not kindness.

"Great God!" he said to a clerk at his elbow, "this is the Valley of Bones; and they have come to life. But, indeed, I had not dreamed there were so many."

"There are some five or six hundred of 'em, I believe," answered Lieutenant Mainwaring, who escorted the visitor. Then he addressed the prisoners.

"Now who is to speak for the rest with Mr. Blazey?"

Stark instantly stepped forward and saluted.

"You!" exclaimed the soldier.

"Yes, my comrades honour me with this grave commission."

"Then be brief, young man," said Blazey, "for I don't want to ride over Dartmoor in the dark."

"Be brief!" echoed Stark, with fire flashing to his eye. "Be brief! Why, you——"

Here with an effort and in response to the murmur of warning voices behind him, he curbed his temper and made another answer.

"Our grievances can't be very briefly told, Mr. Reuben Blazey; but I will set them out in as few words as possible. First and worst, the scum and offscouring of the French prisons are poured in upon us to our terrible discomfort. Next we desire to tell you that our contractors are rogues. For five days in the week the law directs that we receive one and a half pounds of brown bread, one half-pound of beef, including bone—of which God knows we get our share—one-third of an ounce of barley and salt, one-third of an ounce of onions, and one pound of turnips. The residue of the week we have one pound of pickled fish and coals enough to cook it. These things are daily served by the contractors, and we have watched them scrimp weight cruelly to fill their pockets out of our starving bellies. Upon beef days we suffer most."

"Go on," said Mr. Blazey. He yawned, scratched under his wig, and turned to a clerk.

"You are making notes, Mr. Williams?"

"Yes, sir—full notes."

"Next," continued Stark, "the printed regulations delivered to us by Commandant Cottrell speak explicitly of what your Government has undertaken to do on our account. We are not criminals, but honest men. Why do not you understand that? We are allowed each a hammock, one blanket, one horse-rug, and a bed containing four pounds of flocks. Every eighteen months we are to receive one woollen cap for our heads, one yellow roundabout jacket, one pair of pantaloons, and a waistcoat such as you give your soldiers. We are furthermore promised one shirt and one pair of shoes every nine months."

"And 'tis high time your tarnal thieves was delivered of them shoes. Look at our feet!" burst out a voice from the ranks of the captives.

"Silence!" cried Stark. Then he turned to Mr. Blazezy.

"These things——"

"You have," interrupted the Agent. "Are you not attired in them, you who speak?"

"Look at me!" answered Stark. "Regard these scarecrows behind me and say if such a pandemonium of grotesque devils ever filled human eyes outside a nightmare. Heaven knows that we are thin enough, yet our yellow jackets might have been made for skeletons. Look!" He stretched up his arms. "Mine comes scarce below my elbows."

"You happen to be a giant," objected Blazezy.

"Then why, in the name of God, don't you give him a giant's jacket?" roared Knapps from the rear. He was silenced and Stark proceeded.

"Our pantaloons you can study for yourself, Mr. Blazezy. You can note the space visible between them and our waistcoats. But the shoes are still worse. They are made of wood and rotten yarn, and these granite floors knock them to pieces in a week. I pray you see to these things. Here surely are caricatures of men that would make England weep if she could see them."

"Have you done with your facts, sir?" inquired the Agent.

"Very nearly. Now there are certain offices, such as sweeping, shaving prisoners, cooking and the like, that receive payment; and those who can execute mechanic arts here may daily earn sixpence. Why are not our humbler folk allowed to share these privileges? The French receive all these offices, though the

Americans are quite as deft as they. There is also the vit matter of the market. The French traffic weekly with the country people and so add fresh food to their store; we are not permitted to do so—a cruel embargo. To sum up, I pray for more food, more clothes, more generosity. We are men against whom the authorities can find no real fault. Our cachot is always empty. I was the last that occupied it. Our guards will tell you that we are courteous, obedient, and patient. Then pray, Mr. Blazey, help us. You know not the awful battle we have to fight here—a battle worse ten thousand times than any between man and man. We endure such cold as you have never endured, sir; we eat such food as you have never eaten; we suffer from such prison evils in shape of loathsome diseases as you will never know. We are very sick and we daily die. How can starving men battle with the reigning horror of smallpox? How can——”

But at the word “smallpox,” Mr. Blazey’s countenance assumed a pallor under its purple and he woke from indifference to extreme activity. His little eyes wandered wildly over the great sea of faces before him. Then he screamed to Lieutenant Mainwaring, “Is this truth that the man utters?”

The young officer took pleasure in Mr. Blazey’s terror, and oblivious of the prisoners or their welfare, made answer—

“True enough. The atmosphere you are breathing is pure poison. Half these men are infected.”

It was a lie, but the Agent believed it, and made an instant bolt for the entrance.

“Then I should have been told. This is murder—deliberate, cold-blooded murder, and you shall smart for it! Let me out for the Lord’s sake, before I’ve gulped any more of their filthy air!”

They made way and opened the gates. Then, before he vanished, Mr. Blazey turned and bawled a word or two towards Stark.

“I’ll see what can be managed for ye. I’ll do my best endeavours. But I’ve no power, and no funds neither. Besides, all exchange of prisoners is stopped for this year. So you’ll do wisely to bide quiet, and trust in God and the Transport Board, not me.”

He vanished, with his clerks and the soldiers after him; and then for a moment silence, dreadful and solemn, fell upon the captives. The haggard faces that had strained upon Blazey so

long as he was visible, turned each to gaze into his neighbour's eyes; the gates fell to, the locks clashed, the sentries on the wall resumed their eternal tramp. Some men, wrought up to a pitch of mental excitement beyond their strength to conceal, shed tears and sneaked in corners to hide them. The boys—powder-monkeys out of captured ships—broke their ranks and went off whooping to leap-frog; the negroes chattered and blubbered apart; some Americans scowled and shook their fists at the blind doors; some cursed their spokesman for bungling the matter; others walked away mute, quite frozen by long suffering to a dead indifference. Many fell to quarrelling among themselves, and their leaders, including Commodore Miller and Stark, sat together and debated upon the failure of this—their forlorn hope. In the dark disappointment of the hour young Burnham lifted his voice against his motherland.

"They have forgotten us!" he said. "We have lived for the States, fought and bled for them: and now we are forgot."

"Nay, lad, don't think it," said Miller. "Your heart is low and time drags into a daily eternity here; but remember that it flies faster outside these walls than within them. Our country is busy."

"'Tis that cursed Agent," growled Leverett to Knapps. "Then he scratched the red-grey wedge of hair upon his chin and turned to Stark.

"I asked Blazezy as he came in whether he had got our letters and he nodded. He's in communication with both Governments."

"That 'ere man will hev the devil's toasting-fork in his guts afore he's much older," prophesied Knapps. "He's a traitor."

"Please Providence smallpox will clutch the swine; then an honest man may get his billet," said Leverett.

Thus they uttered folly and went stormily to their rest; but upon the morning of the next day the Seven, strolling together, listened to reason and formulated a plan of action. Their sick mate, Caleb Carberry, was this day discharged cured from hospital, and he listened to Burnham, who narrated the events of the previous evening.

"We've done what we might by fair means. Now it remains for us to trust to our wits and our right arms," said Stark.

"The wall men have built, men can climb," declared Burnham.

"What say you, Commodore?"

Miller gazed upward at the mighty ring of the inner circumvallation, scarlet-dotted with the sentries.

"I'm with you—over—or under. At Chatham eighteen brave lads escaped from the prison ship, *Crown Prince*, by cutting through the side of her. Well, oak or granite, 'tis all one."

"If we no fly, we burrow berry nice, gentlemen," declared Samuel Cuffee.

"Then 'tis our life's work from this hour to get out," said Carberry. "By hook or crook we'll do it. And with a boss like Commodore Miller, I lay the way will come clear."

"We don't want a lot o' poppy-cock talk, I reckon," added Leverett. "'Tis just a secret for the seven of us—though," he added under his breath to Carberry, "I'm consarned if I like to work with a slave."

Caleb Carberry was a thin, feeble-looking young man who had been cook's mate on the *Marblehead*. He glanced at Cuffee, to whom Leverett referred, and answered aside—

"Sam's all right. No smouch him. Besides, Mister Stark have had him for a servant ever since we sailed."

But Leverett shook his head.

"I don't trust no black man. I'm fearsome of him. He's always snooking around: and so like as not he'll end by busting on the show."

Despite the carpenter's distrust, however, a secret and desperate determination henceforth actuated every member of the Seven, Sam Cuffee included. What skill, energy and intrigue could do, they meant to do. Miller and Stark had personal friends quartered upon parole at Ashburton, some fifteen miles distant, and their purpose now was to escape from Prince Town, enter into communication with these Americans, and so win to the sea-coast and to France.

"Hunger will break through a stone wall," said the Commodore. "How much more may love of liberty do it!"

CHAPTER II

A BRACE OF FOWLS

THE result of their Agent's visit was manifested in various ways to the American prisoners at Prince Town. Some sank back upon despair and cursed each grey morning's light, as it awakened them from the blessed oblivion of sleep; many entered the British Service, and of these not a few were American only in name, for their birthplace was England and they had fought in the enemy's privateers, tempted thereto by handsome payment. Others, like the leaders of the Seven, to whom such surrender meant dishonour, dreamed of escape and occupied their energies with projects and plots toward liberty.

But practical good ultimately accrued to the prisoners from Mr. Reuben Blazey's brief appearance on Dartmoor. That gentleman, perhaps in thanksgiving upon the discovery that he had not taken smallpox, stirred himself to some purpose after all, and not a few of the grievances that Cecil Stark had set forth were presently redressed. The Transport Board sanctioned the renewal of the market in Prison No. 4; the place was entirely divided from its fellows for the greater comfort of those who dwelt there; the French outcasts were put into durance apart, and the negroes, with sole exception of Sam Cuffee, Stark's servant, were also removed from among the Americans.

More than one of the little band that had sworn to escape, now doubted whether, under this amelioration of circumstances, it would be wise or politic to exchange the inside of the prison for the outside. They held that Dartmoor rather than Prince Town made the real prison, and that the great unknown wilderness, with its morasses and precipices, its barren mountain-tops and dangerous tempests, would be but a poor exchange even for the misery of No. 4. But these doubtful ones were overruled

by Stark, Commodore Miller and the youngster, Burnham. Carberry and Leverett most lacked courage; Knapps was indifferent and ready to follow any man; Cuffee took his master's view. That the negro should be permitted to join their secret association had occasioned some natural opposition; but Cecil Stark, whose ideas upon the subject were more than a century ahead of his time, won permission to include the servant; and Sam's personal fitness none questioned, for aboard the *Marble-head* he had proved himself faithful and courageous. It was the principle that awakened objections, not the man.

Soon the markets were again open, and finding that many of the American prisoners had more money than the French, discovering also that they spoke their own tongue and thereby rendered bargaining more easy, the native Moor folk crowded among them and opened a brisk traffic in fowls and eggs, cheese, bacon and butter. No small amount of intoxicating drink was also smuggled among them, though it generally paid duty to some turnkey or sentry before reaching the prisoners. The market stalls were arranged in a wide yard; the current market prices were cried out, so that all might understand, and none from the outer world were permitted to begin his business until he had been carefully searched. But as time went on, and the regular merchants became known to the guards, a little strictness relaxed and relations became friendly. The means of the prisoners varied much. Some were penniless, and made trinkets carved of bone or wood serve them in place of money; some received regular supplies from home, and these privileged ones, Cecil Stark and Burnham among the rest, shared their funds with less fortunate neighbours.

There came a day when, towards the close of the market hours, Leverett and Knapps were standing at one of the stalls and addressing the countrywoman who sat upon an upturned barrel behind it.

"Where's your grandson of late, Mrs. Lee? I ha'n't seen him with you for many a week."

"Nor won't no more," answered Lovey Lee. "He's gone into service—groom to a farmer's darter."

"Waal now! Do your farmers' daughters hev grooms?"

"Not often. She's a lady. 'Tis a newtake farm 'pon Darty-moor, an' the man who started it has got more money than wits.

A BRACE OF FOWLS

99

Jack takes good wages, an' I have half of 'em, as I ought, seeing I brought him up."

Sam Cuffee came up at this minute.

"Missy Lovey Lee," he said, "you dun gib me my proper butter yesterday for Marse Stark. I swear 'twas light, ma'am."

The tall woman, whose head, though she sat on the barrel, was as high as that of Mr. Knapps where he stood beside her, stared at the negro with scorn in her ferocious eyes.

"Get along with you, you black idol! Ban't eighteen ounces to the pound good butter weight? You stole some yourself, I'll swear, to oil your ugly face."

"You's a berry imperent ole woman, and I dun take no notice ob your talk. Har come Marse Stark hisself, so you may just speak to him, ma'am," answered Cuffee.

Stark, carrying a tray, appeared with Burnham. This signal was concerted, and as soon as they saw him the other men moved away together.

"Look here, Mother Lee, these won't do, you know. I must take my custom elsewhere if you are not going to deal straight with me," began the sailor bluntly.

"Eggs—well, what of 'em?" asked Lovey.

"The less said of them the better. Here are six--the remnant of the last dozen I bought. Of the first six that Cuffee broke, I ate none. So the second six you have got to take back and give me six fresh ones from your basket."

But Lovey by no means saw the force of this suggestion.

"What next will you ax? To rob me right an' left be your pleasure always; but I've been weak as a fly with you afore, 'cause of your curly hair. You'd starve a poor woman to death."

"Take them back, or I'll never buy another thing from you. What's more, my friends shall not either," said Stark loudly. Then, before she could answer, he added under his breath, "*Take 'em and look at the yelks!*"

Lovey instantly perceived that more appeared than was spoken. She remembered also more than one conversation with Stark's friends. Struck by her intelligence, unusual education and extraordinary greed, Commodore Miller had called attention to the old woman as being a tool ripe for their hands. Now the preliminary approach promised well, for it was manifest that Mrs. Lee had caught the speaker's meaning.

"I won't; I won't do it—'tis flat robbery, I tell you, an' you'd not care if I starved on the Moor all alone in my hovel without strength to lift a dying prayer. You are cruel devils—all of you, and I'll go back to the French folks, as have got hearts in their breasts. I'll——"

Then Stark, now alive to the fact that Lovey was only acting for the benefit of the sentry, interrupted with threats. But still Mrs. Lee argued, and only after much chatter, and a great deal of disgraceful language, she took back the eggs and gave the sailor six fresh ones in exchange.

"Now I must sell these to somebody else," she said, "or I shan't get bit or sup inside my lips to-day."

"Better eat 'em yourself, Missis," said the sentry. "Anyway, time's up now, so off you go."

A bell rang to clear the market, and the folk began to stream out of the prison.

"Here, Sam!" shouted Stark jubilantly. "Take these to the kitchen. I've near choked myself talking and swearing at that old witch; but I've won my way. She's taken the bad eggs and give me fresh ones instead."

Cuffee hurried forward.

"You was dam smart, sar. I dun fink nobody in de prison could hah git around dat party 'cept you."

And Lovey Lee, grumbling and whining to the last, took herself and her baskets back across the Moor; tramped home; entered her hovel, and then turned with greedy curiosity to the secret of the eggs. She was as safe from interruption in her lonely cabin by Siward's Cross as she had been in the desert of Sahara; yet caution and suspicion were a part of her; therefore she locked her door and covered up her little window with an apron before she turned to her basket. Then, one by one, she broke the eggs into a basin, and her mouth watered at the sight of such food, even while she mourned to see two pennyworth of marketable commodity wasted upon herself. The fifth egg weighed normally; but it was filled with dust, and, after all, Lovey made no rare meal, for she spoilt the mess in the basin by pouring the dust on top of it. A vital matter, however, she rescued, for in the dust was a little roll of paper, and upon the paper a message closely but clearly written.

"To mistress Lee, an offer of money in plenty if she will help

Cecil Stark to escape from the War Prison at Prince Town. Let her sell two fowls next market day if she will serve him; let her sell two ducks if she will not serve him. But if she betray Cecil Stark, his friends will be revenged upon her."

To the young man from Vermont had fallen this first step in the plot. Lots were drawn as to who should get the message to Lovey Lee, for all agreed that one only need be inculcated until it was certain that she would assist them. Now, if she proved loyal to the authorities, Stark alone would suffer; but upon that score little anxiety was felt, for Lovey had often expressed sentiments much the reverse of patriotic, and had at all times made it clear that money was the only sovereign lord she acknowledged or served.

Upon the following market day two fine fat fowls were displayed at Mrs. Lee's stall. She sat behind them on her upturned barrel, and gave Stark an indifferent "good morning" as he strolled past with the Commodore and James Knapps.

"Here's a nice brace of chicks, your honour," said Lovey.

But Stark laughed and shook his head.

"No luxuries to-day, ma'am; we're not made of money, you know. They would look well upon Commandant Cottrell's table."

"I serve him, too," she answered. "But he likes his poultry stuffed wi' marjoram an' wild thyme."

"And these?"

"They be stuffed different."

"Well, we won't quarrel as to that. Hungry men don't criticise their sauces. What's the price?"

"You shall have 'em for half-a-crown."

"Lordy! Preserve us agin you greedy women!" cried Knapps. "I reckon you'd make soup out o' stones an' sell it for ten cents a pint if you dared."

"Come along, Commodore," said Stark, "we'll try Mrs. Luscombe at the next stall. Lovey Lee's too grasping."

At that moment William Burnham approached and saw the fowls.

"Just what I want," he exclaimed. "Poor Matthew Mercer's still alive; but he can't eat any victuals, so we'll make some chicken broth for him. What's your price, Mrs. Lee?"

Lovey glanced at Stark, and, seeing that he was not concerned, understood that she might sell safely.

"Half a crown, an' I'd sooner fling 'em into the Moon for the foxes than take a penny less," she said.

Commodore Miller turned to a sentry and asked the market value of fowls. The man did not know, but a turnkey passing at that moment answered him.

"Fowls are tenpence each—eighteen pence a pair to-day," he said.

Whereupon Lovey called down lightning upon his head, and behaved with such impropriety that the man turned round in a rage and threatened to have her removed out of the markets. Upon this she relapsed into sulky silence, and presently, after some haggling, took the money that was her due, and almost flung the fowls at Burnham.

Anon Mr. Cuffee departed with the poultry under his arm, and, guessing what to expect, he made a careful examination. A few words much to the point were scrawled upon paper and packed within one bird. Lovey Lee had written an answer to Stark's invitation.

"Right. Tell me what you want and what you'll give. Put message in a chaw of baccy next week."

CHAPTER III

THE GREEN APPLE

IT sometimes happened that at those hours when the guard was being changed, seconds and even minutes passed, during which a sentry-box might be empty and a section of the inner wall remain unguarded. It was proposed by the Seven to avail themselves of such a moment in the dusky evening hour before all prisoners were called upon to leave the exercise yard and pass behind locked doors. Between the inner and outer walls of the prison extended a space or patrol ground of ten yards in breadth; but while the inner wall offered no special difficulties, as the sentries' staircases were built into the side of it, the second wall presented a harder problem. By climbing upon each other's shoulders like acrobats it was hoped to scale it, but since the message from the miser, this plan was abandoned in favour of mechanical means.

For necessary apparatus the conspirators looked to Lovey Lee. Her businesslike reply to Stark promised well.

"We must give her more to help us out than the authorities would give her to reveal our plans," explained Commodore Miller. "She would get but three pounds a head for us if she turned traitor. Let her have ten pounds a head to free us and all will probably be done that she can do. Lovey Lee sells herself to the highest bidder. Her only steadfast principle is dollars."

"Suppose I was to give her a tarnation fright, and let on as her life wouldn't be worth a chip if she rounded on us?" suggested David Leverett.

But Stark and Miller protested at such short-sighted policy.

"She won't be driven, and she won't be frightened," declared the Commodore. "Her friendship is vital now. We've got to submit terms, and they will need to be high."

"Best to offer a hundred pounds right off," said Burnham.

"The difficulty will be to get her to help us without the money in advance," declared Stark.

Then came the great business of the communication to Mrs. Lee. It was duly written and anon reached Lovey tight packed in a huge piece of tobacco. Knapps apparently cut the quid from a roll and handed it to her in exchange for a bundle of watercresses. The woman put it into her cheek at once, and kept it there until opportunity offered to hide it in her pocket. Then, as before, she hastened home upon the completion of market, locked her door, covered her window, and set to work to read.

"We want

Item. A map or picture of the road from Prince Town to the town of Ashburton.

Item. A letter to be delivered to the first prisoner on parole, who shall be seen walking by you along that road, within the measured mile from Ashburton.

Item. An answer to that letter acknowledging its receipt.

Item. A map or picture of the road from Prince Town to your Cottage, so that if one escapes he may lie hid with you, and thus be of service to his friends.

Item. Three hundred yards of thin copper wire in lengths that can be wound up inside a fowl or other bird.

Item. Twenty very large iron nails that may be driven between the stones of masonry

We offer

One hundred English pounds. Ten will reach you from time to time on market days during the next three weeks. This will be placed between other moneys when we buy and you sell. Ten will reach you on the day that the last of the stipulated articles are received. Ten will reach you on the day that the first man of us gets clear of Prince Town. The balance will reach you when we are all free. There are seven of us. We can only promise by the God of Heaven to keep this contract. We place ourselves in your power, and you must trust us as we trust you."

Lovey Lee reflected long upon this communication. Then she put it aside and ate a meal of black bread and pickled snails.

The snails were salted down in a barrel, and she forked them out of their shells and ate them with indifference. Her senses of taste and smell were alike faulty. She cared nothing for food and only drank tea made of wild herbs.

"'Tis a dreadful risk—an' me as never trusted a human soul since I was short-coated!" reflected the miser. "Yet nothing venture nothing have. A hundred would make up the thousand down along to Hangman's Hollow. An' it might fall out that after I'd got their money, 'twould be in my power to give 'em up to the prison people again. Seven of 'em. That would add up to twenty-one pound at three pound a head. There'll be ten pound anyway—clean profit afore I do anything. Then I'll make a journey, for I've got a bag full of small money waiting to go."

She referred to her secret treasure-house in the Moor. Money she never kept beside her, but conveyed to her hoard at such times as the moon shone after midnight and she could count upon creeping over the wilderness unseen.

Lovey Lee's answer was practical. Three days later she tramped to Ashburton and walked ten miles to that town and ten miles back again without weariness. Thus she killed two birds with one stone, for she purchased a hundred yards of thin copper wire, and she refreshed her mind as to the road and its nature. Mile by mile the old woman set down the track upon a sheet of paper bought at Ashburton for that purpose. She marked the features of the land upon it, wrote the names of the adjacent tors, and indicated bridges and rivers across which the highway passed. As for the wire, she purchased it ostensibly to make rabbit-snares, for which purpose it was chiefly sold. A few of the prisoners upon parole she also saw taking exercise, and knew them by their speech.

Upon the following market day, Lovey appeared at the Prison with full baskets, and her big teeth closed tightly under her lips as the turnkey, from some unusual prick of conscience or accession of zeal, stopped her and overhauled her basket.

"Hullo, missis, what's this, then?" he inquired, looking at a fine goose.

"Your brother," said Mrs. Lee promptly.

"Then best give him to me to bury decently, though 'twill be a cannibal act. You shall have a shilling for him."

"A shilling! Look at the market rates? Geese be paid according to weight—an' this ere bird's nine pound if it's a grain. But ban't for you. I promised young Cecil Stark as he should have a goose to his birthday."

"And so he shall then," said the turnkey. "Mr. Stark's a gentleman. He made me a toy for my child last week. 'Twas a clever little thing, fashioned like a windmill, out of mutton bones. I lay he'll do summat with the skeleton of that goose."

The Americans greeted Lovey with their usual heartiness, but she refused to sell her bird until young Stark and his friends approached. Then, before he could make any remark, she lifted up her voice to him.

"I've kep' my promise, young man, an' here's your birthday feast, though you may think yourself lucky it have reached you, for Mr. Turnkey there was terrible set upon it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Lee; and the price?"

"Half-a-crown, though a grasping party might ax three shilling."

"You shall have three."

"'Tis but just. All the same, it ban't a very young bird—rather old, in truth. An' I haven't drawn it, for their insides *be a bit wiry* when they come to full growth."

"So much the better for our teeth," said Burnham

"For that matter, we shall hev plenty of time to eat him," declared Knapps.

"Well, lads, to-morrow night we'll pick his bones, and if Mrs. Lee can manage to get a bottle of brandy past our friend there——"

The turnkey winked.

"If 'tis for physic——" he said.

"Certainly, certainly. Don't you wherrit about that. A jorum o' drink for the sick folk. Narry a one on us would displease you ter drink it ourselves, I'm sure," declared Leverett.

"And a noggin hot—for you yourself," said Stark. Then he handed silver coins to Lovey Lee; and, feeling between them in her pocket as she slipped them down, the old woman knew that a half-sovereign had come also.

From that moment she conducted her business with most unusual amiability. She jested with Burnham and Cecil Stark; she cleared her baskets, and in a fit of reckless generosity pre-

THE GREEN APPLE

107

sented Leverett with a green apple, which remained when all else was sold.

"Can't eat it," said the sailor. "My stomach have struck work : but this here nig will let it down, no doubt."

"You'd do better to keep it for a love token," said the miser : but Mr. Cuffee had already taken the fruit.

"Don't eat it ; treasure it," she said. "Then you can tell your black maidens when you go home-along that you had a sweetheart in England who loved you so bad that her hair grewed white for you."

"I lub you too, ma'am. I lub anybody who gib me apples," said Sam. "You's de boofullest young ting I ebber see, and I dun fink about no udder gal no more. And I marry you when dey let me out ob dis dam bowray, I swar !"

At the same moment Mr. Cuffee opened his huge mouth and the apple was gone. Mrs. Lee looked fixedly at him and laughed a curious laugh.

"You clunk apples like a dog do swallow bones," she said. "There's the bell ; an' I shan't come no more for a week belike, for I've got to get in my peat now, because winter will be knocking at the door again afore long. Then we must have heat about us, for once let the marrow freeze in your bones 'pon Dartmoor, an' you'm dead."

She departed, and within the hour Mr. Cuffee made a careful search upon the goose. Two skeins of wire were concealed therein, and a scrap of paper, whose laconic message Stark presently deciphered.

"I'll trust you since I must. Fifty yards a're along with this. And in the apple I shall give to Leverett you'll find a map of the road. Have your letter ready for they Ashburton chaps next time I come."

Samuel Cuffee wept when he learned what he had done, and vowed to atone for his greediness if only the Lord would offer him an opportunity to do so ; but the error was righted at Mrs. Lee's next visit. On this occasion she brought a big red apple for Stark. She also carried more wire concealed in a sucking pig, and she took home with her a letter which the Americans furnished. It was carefully hidden in a gift.

They had made Lovey Lee a new pipe with a piece of hard wood for its bowl and a mouthpiece of goose-bone. Packed

within this hollow bone was a missive for a friend of Stark—a gentleman who dwelt upon parole with an Ashburton farmer.

So, day by day and week by week the intercourse was continued, until Lovey Lee found herself the richer by ten pounds, and the plotters possessed maps, nails, wire, and certain communications from their distant accomplices. These objects reached them in pats of butter, in carrots or turnips, in ducks and fowls. Once, when a sentry commented upon the fondness of the Americans for poultry, Lovey Lee affected a furious indignation, accused the man of paltering with her character, and insisted upon disembowelling a bird under the public eye, that her innocence might be established.

At length all preliminaries for their attempt were completed, and only an opportunity and a twilight of grey weather remained to wait for. But each day augmented their anxieties, for the vigilance of Commandant Cottrell increased. Others beside Cecil Stark and his friends had not only prepared but executed remarkable escapes. Several men safely cleared the prison precincts only to be recaptured; several were found drowned in the rivers, whose crystal floods deceived them by their seeming shallowness; a few vanished never again to be seen or heard of; others made successful escapes, and finally reaching Tor Quay or Dartmouth, got clear to France, and so home again. One young man from Cecil Stark's State of Vermont went boldly forth in a girl's clothes, which were smuggled to him by a farmer's daughter under a basket of cabbages. A French prisoner nearly came off by stealing a sentry's coat and hat. But as he whistled on the way out, and adopted the air of the *Marseillaise*, a guard challenged and the man was arrested. Many other instances, successful and futile, were recorded. Therefore Stark and the Seven exercised all caution and patience until fair conditions should open before them and their undertaking promise a triumphant issue.

CHAPTER IV

A FRIEND IN NEED

IMMEDIATELY without the War Prison stood a ruined cot, and, distant some few hundred yards to the north-east beneath it, a river ran. This stream, named Blackabrook, was crossed by a pack-horse road that passed over Ockery Bridge; and here, one hundred years ago, in place of the existing cottage, there stood a neat little dwelling-house. Verandahs extended round it; the walls were of granite, and the roof of reeds. Upon one side a view of Prince Town spread, while southward its windows commanded the valley of the river.

Here dwelt Captain Cottrell, Commandant of the prison settlement; and now, together with a handsome, genial man clad in black, he shall be seen sitting under his verandah and drinking port wine after midday dinner. The Captain's visitor was of a kindly countenance and pleasant voice.

"So much for that, then, Mr. Norcot. You'll send to us from your mills at Chagford such quantities of flocks as Government shall determine for the new mattresses."

"Exactly. I'm always gratified to oblige the Government."

"We can make them here—the mattresses, I mean. We have a little world of skilled artificers within our walls. You see, Holland is in league with Napoleon, and many of our captives taken out of Dutch vessels are Eurasians, Malays and Chinese from the service of the Dutch East India Company. The world has sent us representatives of every civilised race, and among them are craftsmen from each trade that man practises."

Peter Norcot nodded.

"All sorts and conditions of men.' Do you recollect what Shenstone says?

"Let the gull'd fool the toils of war pursue,
Where bleed the many to enrich the few.'

You shall have your flocks and a good article. Since my lamented senior partner's death I have been busy in certain directions. Uncle Norman Norcot was a conscientious and a conservative soul, and he regarded the new labour-saving contrivances with the utmost suspicion. How he hated 'em! But amongst such things there is a remarkable new flock-cutter. These matters, however, will not interest you."

The Captain emptied his glass and rose.

"I'll take your word for all that. Now come along. You desire a glimpse of our caged beasts and the Prison?"

"Even so—delighted to exchange my flocks for your herds."

An orderly brought round their horses and in five minutes Peter departed with Captain Cottrell.

"Now enter the bear garden, Mr. Norcot, and do not fear the growling. For reasons not known to me, my beasts have a hearty hatred of their head keeper."

It was true, and Norcot observed that his guide won little but scowls and indifference upon his way through the prisons. Occasionally an officer among the captives would salute him; as a rule the prisoners turned their backs.

"A strange and many-coloured assembly—of rags," commented Norcot. "*Spectatum admissi risum tenatis amici?*" But really to the man of sentiment 'tis a matter for tears rather than laughter. I observe you are unpopular, Commandant."

"The fate of most men who do their duty, sir."

"How true!"

"Not one fool amongst them has the wit to guess at my onerous labours," continued Cottrell. "Old General Rochambeau, who is living on parole with me at Ockery Bridge, will scarcely exchange a civil word, and prefers to eat his meals in the seclusion of his chamber. He is for ever abusing '*Les mirmidons de Transport Service*'; and yet the ancient ass makes me laugh sometimes. He received letters recently, and one of them told him that Napoleon would land in England on the twenty-third of July last. Upon that day he appeared in full dress, booted and spurred, with all his orders on—ready to welcome Boney should he honour Dartmoor with a visit."

"He may come here yet—to stop."

"I hope so. Be very sure no parole will ever be granted to one who has so often broke his oath."

A FRIEND IN NEED

111

They had now entered Prison No. 4.

"Here are my black sheep," said Captain Cottrell. "One Yankee is more trouble than twenty Frenchmen. Never satisfied. There are exceptional men amongst them—representatives of the old American gentry; but the greater number are the very rubbish and offscourings of the sea, swept here by our men-o'-war. I believe that near half of them are Englishmen from the privateers. They get high bounties for that work; but they are a reckless and dangerous company. These men set the hulks on fire at Plymouth."

"Made the ships too hot to hold 'em? But they are safe enough here. Tut, tut! Dartmoor would tame the Devil himself, once he was on a chain."

The yellow-coated prisoners wandered about, and some exchanged private jests as Cottrell passed, and some fell into silence until he was out of earshot. Then a very tall, finely built man, drew himself up and saluted the reigning power.

"You see there is a gentleman now and then to be found among them."

"And that particular gentleman I have good cause to know," answered Norcot. "May I exchange compliments with him? 'Twas he who, in a moment of undue haste, broke my head."

Cecil Stark found himself summoned, and Mr. Norcot told the Commandant of their meeting at the church.

"Then, like a lion, he felled me with his paw. I hope no fist will ever hit me so hard again."

"He is prominent among them, and his influence is all for good," said the Commandant carelessly in Stark's hearing.

"And a sailor; and doubtless good-hearted, like all sailors. Well, Mr. Stark, your servant, sir."

Cecil Stark recognised the wool-stapler immediately, and shook the hand extended to him.

"I hope I see you well, sir," he said, "and none the worse for my stupidity."

"In excellent health, I thank you. My nose, as you see, stands where it did. Yet I am much reduced from my usual level of humour by this sight."

"A dreary spectacle enough."

"You are probably unfamiliar with Cowper? It is your loss.

"'War's a game which, were their subjects wise,
King's should not play at.'"

Neither kings nor yet Congresses. Perhaps, had you read Cowper, you would have stopped at home, Mr. Stark?"

"It takes two to fight, Mr. Norcot. My kinsman, General Stark—but I'll not prate of that, though this I'll say: 'tis a base and a cowardly deed to deny parole to Commodore Miller and his officers. We handled the frigate *Marblehead* like honest men; and we had fairly beaten your *Thunderbolt*. She was about to strike when the *Flying Fish* and the *Squirrel* hove in sight and bore down. Then she fought on. We ourselves had hardly struck to them before the *Thunderbolt* sank. These things I learned from the prize crew that brought the *Marblehead* into Falmouth."

"I understand that there were technical reasons why parole was denied to the officers of the *Marblehead*," explained Captain Cottrell.

"You may understand, sir," retorted Stark, "but none among us was ever made to do so."

Norcot nodded thoughtfully. True to his invariable custom, he set himself the task of making a friend.

"You get supplies regularly?" he asked.

"He does—and shares 'em with the poorer folks," said Cottrell.

"He has great wealth, I believe," he added under his breath.

"You want parole, naturally—like any other officer and gentleman. Why not?"

"'Rash, fruitless war, from wanton glory waged,
Is only splendid murder,'"

as Thomson very truly remarks. Yet even war has its laws."

"Most certainly. And Commodore Miller and his officers possess a right to parole. Miller is one of the ablest men in the navy of the United States," declared the young sailor.

"Ah—possibly that's where the difficulty lies. However, though I cannot pretend to any considerable interest, yet some I have with one or two very distinguished gentlemen of the British East India Company. It has been my privilege to do them a service. Maybe Peter Norcot will prove the mouse to nibble you lions out of your granite cage. Who can tell? You have my word of honour that I will endeavour to better your lot."

At friendship so gratuitous, Cecil Stark found himself much moved. He hurried forward and shook Peter very warmly by the hand.

"Thank you, thank you with all my heart and soul: and thank

God for sending you," he said. "'Tis not only for myself I speak, but for better men. Miller is not young, and this terrible place is making him old and infirm before his time."

"Well, I'll see; and recollect that I'm doing good for evil. My mistress owes you little thanks, Mr. Stark, and I still less. But all's well that ends in Christian charity."

"Are you going to marry that lovely young lady?" asked Stark.

"That is my happy privilege. What is your fate to mine? You suffer until the end of the war—perhaps not so long. But I—Mistress Grace Malherb has transported me for life! Tut, tut! You do not see the jest? How dense a sailor can be! Well, God be with you, Mr. Stark. May you dance at her wedding."

"'Twould be a glorious experience, Mr. Norcot. I hope your fortune will prove worthy of you. May your life be a happy and a blessed thing, for you are a noble man," said the youngster earnestly.

"I will not contradict a gentleman," said Peter. Then he bowed and went upon his way, to be rated and laughed at by Captain Cottrell for conduct the Commandant held most Quixotic.

With great good temper, Mr. Norcot explained his theory of life, and denied that any human action was innocent of an ulterior motive. Then, having seen the Prison, he rode off. But home he did not go. His goal was Fox Tor Farm, and he designed to spend a couple of days there before returning to Chagford.

Much had happened to him since his last visit, and his position in the Wool Factory was now supreme. The senior partner—an elderly man and Peter's uncle—had fallen upon evil times in his home. Finally, Mr. Norman Norcot's young wife ran away with a neighbouring squire; whereupon the unfortunate husband descended into gloom and darkness, and life grew a weariness to him. At last he relinquished the burden, and, going upon the Moor to shoot game, he destroyed himself—an action that placed his nephew at the head of the famous business.

Now, conscious of these new dignities, Peter proceeded towards Cater's Beam, and as he went he committed young Stark's statement to memory.

"*Marblehead* fought and defeated *Thunderbolt*. Latter vessel about to strike to the American when His Majesty's ships *Squirrel* and *Flying Fish* appeared. *Marblehead* taken. Parole denied to her officers. Why? Cecil Stark—related to General Stark, conqueror of our General Burgoyne. Yet the pen is mightier than the sword, as Burgoyne knew. Commodore Miller, noteworthy American sailor."

In his mind Norcot was already dictating a letter to certain friends who possessed interest at the highest quarters, when he passed Siward's Cross. Then, lifting his eyes, he saw Lovey Lee at work in a peat-cutting close at hand, and approached her with a desire to be better acquainted.

"Well met, mother. A drink of milk for a thirsty man, I pray you."

Lovey put down the glittering peat knife with which she toiled, and rose to her full height.

"So 'tis! The gentleman as I seed with Grace Malherb?"

"The same. I hope I see you well."

Mrs. Lee did not answer, but started to fetch the milk, and Peter followed her. Presently she produced a teacup and handed it to him.

"I thank you. And here's a shilling; but you must let me have some change—sixpence at least." This he said to try her.

Bitterly disappointed, Lovey returned to her den, and while she was absent, Mr. Norcot, who had not drunk milk since he was a baby, emptied his teacup into the heather. He was apparently smacking his lips when the old woman reappeared.

"I've no change but these dirty coppers from the prisoners to Prince Town. The hands that held 'em last was shaking with smallpox, but of course you won't mind," she said.

"Tut, tut! Keep them, keep them, my dear woman. I only jested. So you traffic in the prison markets with the French?"

"No—the Yankees. I understand their speech, and they've got more money," said Lovey, stroking the coppers.

"Ah!—'tis an ill wind that blows good to nobody. So you begin to get money, my poor soul? But be very careful, I beg of you.

" 'For Satan now is wiser than of yore,
And tempts by making rich, not making poor,' "

"Rich! Great riches mine! Look around."

"For my part I pray daily that these ghastly wars will soon be over," said Peter.

"That's where we be of different minds, then," she answered.

"Different minds and different interests, Mrs. Lee. Well, I'm glad to see you again. It may happen some day that you can do me a service, or I can do you one."

"I see—with that maiden?"

Her eyes glittered, and she pointed down the valley to Fox Tor Farm.

"Good gracious! No," said Peter, astonished that she had guessed so near his thoughts. "The days of witchcraft and love-potions are past, ma'am. Not that I want anything of that sort. Grace Malherb adores me."

She looked at him with curiosity.

"My grandson be her groom now," she said; but did not add that John Lee had confided to her the girl's dislike for Peter.

"It is a wise and rare maiden who knows her own mind, mother. I may add that 'None but the brave deserves the fair,' as Dryden so happily remarks. Farewell."

Lovey nodded, and he rode away.

"A strong, dangerous fashion of man," she thought with her eyes upon him. "An' wants my friendship for his own ends. Well, my friendship is always open to the highest bidder, Lord He knows. An' the maiden be going to take a bit of managing by the looks of it. John Lee had more in his mind than he spoke, last time he comed to tell with me an' pay me half his wages."

Meantime Peter trotted forward, and presently he beheld the raw stone walls and broken lands of the farm. He shook his head at this display of much futile labour, then turned at the thud of galloping horses and saw his sweetheart and her groom approaching over the shaggy crest of the Beam.

John Lee dropped back quickly as Mr. Norcot stopped, but the wool-stapler had sharp eyes, and he made a mental note of what he saw.

"Well met, my lovely lady!" he cried a few minutes later. "Of all maidens who sat a steed none ever became one as you do!"

"'Tis well in stone to have three Graces
With lovely limbs and lovely faces;
But better far, and not in stone,
To have the three combined in One."

Isn't that a pretty thing? I kept it to greet you with."

"Not your own, I'll wager," said Grace; "but never mind—don't come nearer, please. 'Cæsar,' is fidgety. I hope that you are well, Peter."

"Your groom was near enough as you came over the hill, my treasure."

"Yes, 'Cæsar' knows him. We were talking about his grandmother."

"The horse's?"

Peter turned and beckoned to Lee; then, as John cantered up, Mr. Norcot regarded him critically.

"What a picture! I never saw such a wonderfully handsome lad—an Apollo's face. 'Disguised like a ploughman, Love stole from the sky'—eh, Grace?"

The heart of Miss Malherb beat fiercely, but in secret.

"He's no ploughman," she answered.

"I'm jealous," continued Peter. "Tut, tut! I feel the green-eyed monster's fiery breath scorching my liver!" Then he spoke to the groom, who now approached. "Give you good day, lad. And, John Lee, dost know that Mr. Bolitho of Ivybridge is seeking an underwhip for his pack of hounds? Say the word, and I'll commend you."

John's eyes flashed; he smiled and touched his hat.

"Thank you very kindly, sir—ve., kindly indeed; but I'm well suited in Mr. Malherb's service."

"You mean in Miss Malherb's, you lucky dog!" said the man of business. Then he winked genially, while Lee, reddening under his clear brown skin, galloped forward to open a gate that led into the outlying lands of the farm.

CHAPTER V

FOLLY

HAD Mr. Norcot heard the conversation which he interrupted between John Lee and Grace, it must have amazed him exceedingly and reminded him of his lady's youth and inexperience.

Those most concerned knew nothing of the relation that now obtained between Grace and her servant, for that a daughter of his could look upon a groom was an idea beyond the wildest mental flight of Maurice Malherb; but humbler folks found themselves not wholly ignorant of recent developments. Harvey Woodman had hinted to his wife that the girl spent a great deal of her time in riding with miser Lee's grandson, and Mary Woodman murmured in secret upon this unquiet theme with Dinah Beer. The question in their minds related to Mrs. Malherb.

"Ought us to tell her?" asked Mary. "Such a good, high-minded lady as her be. An' Miss Gracie—so promising as a March calf, bless her."

"'Tis a hard thing. I've nought against the boy for my part either," declared Dinah. "He's civil an' smart, an' his face would soften a stone. But they'm both young, an', loramercy! what Nature teaches boys an' girls ban't wisdom, for sartain! Mr. Norcot will never come it over her, for she hates him. Her told me once, when I caught her crying all alone, poor maiden, that she couldn't abide his shadow, an' when I said as her parents knowed best about it, she talked treason wi' the fire in her cheeks. 'Love can't be made to order,' her said; an' when I tolled something about her duty, she cut me short an' axed, 'Do you love your Richard, Dinah?' 'Ess fay!' I sez. 'An' if your faither an' mother had told you to marry some person else—what then?' she sez. 'There, Miss, let me get to my work,' I answered her;

but the truth—I couldn't tell it: that me an' Dick runned an' got married against faither's orders, as meant for me to take a cordwainer to Tavistock."

"Shall we tell Kekewich?" suggested Mrs. Woodman. "For all his wickedness he'd never do an unwitty thing. He's terrible wise—not after the event, when us all be—but in time."

"I couldn't," declared Dinah. "It do always bring a cloud to my heart when I see his pain-stained face—such a prophet of evil as he be."

"He never promises any good to anybody, so he's always right," answered Mrs. Woodman, who was in a pessimistic vein.

"My husband don't like him, no more don't I," replied the other woman. "Don't say nought to him—a baggering old Job's comforter. He'd get John Lee turned off without a character. Us have right an' reason to trust Miss Grace in such a thing. Only I do wish the proper one would turn up. She never sees a young man but him."

"A terrible pretty chap—Lee, I mean. Have 'e noticed how mincing he gets in's speech?"

"Dick an' your husband was laughing at him for it last night. He picks it up from Miss Grace."

"Which shows they must have a lot to say to one another."

Dinah nodded, and with an uneasy sense of guilt changed the conversation. But the truth was in fact nearer their suspicions than they guessed, and Grace Malherb, by slow degrees, had come to make a close friend and confidant of John Lee. He possessed other charms than beauty, for his mind was simple; his heart was generous; his disposition kindly. Romance and some mystery hovered round him; and Grace, left much to her own devices, found the groom too often in her mind, his voice too often upon her ear.

A critical conversation fell out between them upon the day of Norcot's return to Fox Tor Farm. For three months Lee had now served his new master, and attended Grace to all parts of the Moor. Sometimes Mr. Malherb accompanied these expeditions, and generally he superintended Grace's hurdle practice, for she was to hunt during the coming season; but the father did not always find himself at leisure to follow this pleasant task, and Lee, whose first duty was to wait upon Miss Malherb, went far afield with her alone.

From indifference Grace woke to pleasure at his delicate and refined nature. She encouraged him to talk, and presently heard as much of his scanty story as he himself knew. The narrative fired her imagination, and lent him a romantic interest to her mind. Gradually she divulged a few of her own secrets, and the less he apparently desired to know, the more she found herself telling him. His courteous reserve even piqued her upon occasion. Once she quarrelled with him, and bade him retire. But her apology upon the following day, brought him quickly to her side.

"'Twas not indifference, God knows, Miss Grace," he told her. "I held back for fear I might seem too forward in your affairs. Every breath you draw is a thing of account to me. I do know by the very light in your eyes whither your thoughts be tending—up or down. An' I'm loth to call Mr. Norcot into your mind; for his name brings a shadow over your face, like a cloud across noon sunshine."

"I thought you yawned yesterday, John, when I mentioned him. That is what angered me."

"'Yawned'! I've never yawned since I knowed you."

"Since you *knew* me, John. You are so slow to mend that weak ending of the past tense. 'Tis a part of Devon speech—a thing in their blood—but not in yours."

"I wish I knew all that was in my blood," he answered.

"You will some day. Light will come. Sometimes I think old Lovey stole you, as gipsies steal little children. 'Tis monstrous to suppose that you are kin of hers."

"Not so; her daughter was my dear good mother without a doubt."

"'Tis strange how a man's heart warms to the very name of his mother, though he has never known her," said Grace.

"Mine does, but I can only remember a white face and great frightened eyes that belonged to her. And when I ask my granddam for my father, she laughs—that laugh like tin beating on tin—and tells me to look in the river and I'll see him."

"He was a very handsome man then. You've got about the most beautiful ears I ever saw on anybody."

She spoke in a pensive and a critical tone with her eyes lifted to the hills, as though she spoke to them.

"Good Lord, Miss Grace. Have I?"

And so they talked and daily drifted nearer danger. A conversation of moment happened between them concerning Lovey Lee. John ransacked his memory for Grace's benefit and told her of early recollections, of his mother's funeral, of his arrival with Mrs. Lee at Siward's Cross when a child, and of his first labours upon the Moor.

"I had to collect the lichen of which they make dyes," he said; "then I went cool-gathering, and grew very clever at setting briars in the sheep-tracks. Later I learned to plait reeds, or rushes as I should call 'em; then a man taught me how to ride. And as I grew and got sense, my grandmother became a greater wonder and mystery to me. She lived two lives, and of one I knew nothing. Oftentimes I found that she went abroad by night. Lying in my straw near the cattle, with their sweet breath coming to me, I'd wake and see light in the slits of the boards overhead where Granny slept. Then she would douse the flame—put it out, I mean—and the boards would creak and she'd come down the ladder and go out into the night. 'Twas moonlight she always chose, and once, when I was a bit of a lad, up home twelve years old, I reckoned I'd follow after and see what 'twas that took her off so secret when all things slept. But 'twas a poor thought for me. I followed 'pon a summer night in staring moonlight; and half a mile from Fox Tor, under which she went, my foot slipped where I was sneaking along a hundred yards behind her and I fell into a bog. She heard me splash out of it, and afore I could crouch down and hide, her cat's eyes had marked me and she turned and caught me, breathless an' soaking wet to the waist."

"Alack, John! And what did she do?" asked the girl, reining up her horse to hear his answer.

"Well, 'tisn't too strong a word to say that she very nearly knocked the life out of me. She changed from a woman into a demon. She screamed like to a horrid vampire, and clapper-clawed me from head to foot. 'You'd spy, you li'l devil!' she said. 'I'll larn you to peep 'pon my doings; I'll tear your liver out, I'll——' Then under her blows I went off fainty, an' she scratched me like a cat-a-mountain, an', no doubt, left me for dead. I was only a little boy, of course, and she was just the same as she is now, only six years stronger. When I come to again she'd gone; but I thought I'd waked to die, for there was

a dreadful bitter pang in my breast I crawled back to the cottage somehow, and next day, when she was out of the way, I caught a donkey she had, and got up to Prince Town. The doctor at the prison by good fortune passed me as I came, and I made bold to tell him I was ill, and he had a look at me and said two of my ribs were broken. They kept me at a cottage up there, where Granny was known, and 'twas a round six weeks afore I went back to her. Then first thing she said was that she'd kill me and salt me down in her snail barrel if ever I spied on her again; so you may be sure I never did."

The story fascinated Grace.

"How you must have suffered! But to think of the secrets that horrid old woman has hidden! It makes my mouth water, John. Father believes that she knows all about the Malherb amphora—the priceless glass vase that vanished, you know—and I believe she knows all about you. These things must be discovered; and 'twill be your task to find them out, John Lee."

"Ah! if I could find my father. But that's a search I'm almost fearful to make. I——"

He broke off, and Grace felt the matter too delicate for comment. Her interest in Lee grew daily, and, ignorant of love, the girl now believed her emotion towards him must be called by that name. He for his part loved indeed with all his young heart and soul. Care clouded his life, because he knew that he was wrong to think twice about his mistress. By night, when alone, his courage sometimes increased; but daylight and duty quenched it. Under darkness he dreamed dreams, yet when he rose to hear rough men laugh at his amended speech, and see Malherb order him hither and thither, as he ordered the rest, John Lee's folly stared him in the face. He fought with himself to relinquish his task and depart from Fox Tor Farm; he fancied that he had conquered himself, and determined to go; then would come a long, lonely ride with Grace, and a return to vain unquiet hopes. His conscience urged him away; his power of will proved insufficient to take him beyond temptation. As for the girl, her tender feeling was an unconscious instinct of self-preservation. She desired a strong protector rather than a lover; and he who might secure her safety was sure to win her active regard. Grace's delight in John Lee, her increasing admiration

for his goodness, honesty and eloquent nature, she mistook for love. The fatuity of such a conclusion was not impressed on the girl's virgin mind; and the secret of John's parentage proved no obstacle to attachment, but rather an incentive. That he was a gentleman in every vital particular she perceived.

Upon this day a barrier fell down between them. She had found herself sad and weak before the approaching shadow of Peter Norcot; and John had waxed desperate, and forgotten everything in heaven and on earth but the lovely, mournful maid beside him. They were but seventeen and eighteen; of the world they knew nothing at all; but his world was in her eyes, and she believed that her future welfare and hopes of happiness now rode at her elbow in the handsome shape of the lad.

"John," he said, exactly one hour before Mr. Norcot's horse appeared nigh Cater's Beam—"John, he's coming to-day."

"I know it. I know the weather of your heart, Miss Grace, as soon as I look upon you; for the eyes are the sky of the mind."

"Come closer," she answered; "come closer and comfort me."

"Mr. Peter is a great man now—head of the Wool Factory, and worth many thousands of pounds."

"Cold comfort! If he was made of gold with diamond eyes he would still be Peter Norcot."

"'Tis strange, but you are the only person in the world that don't like him."

"And you," she said quickly, "you hate him too."

"Yes, I hate him well enough—because he's a coward and a hard-hearted man at bottom to plague you so, when you've made it clear you cannot love him. I hate him for that, I promise you. I could believe dark things against him gladly. Do you know what Tom Putt said?"

"No," replied Grace. "Not that Putt's opinion is of much moment save in matters of salmon."

"He is courting a maiden at Chagford; and her brother—a man called Mason—is an outdoor servant to Mr. Norcot. And last Sunday, when the women were at church, Putt had speech with this man, and they got merry over drink. Tom praised Mr. Norcot mightily, and his servant said with great admiration that he believed as like as not, Mr. Peter had killed his uncle to get head of the Wool Factory. Mason said he couldn't pay Mr. Norcot a higher compliment for skill and cleverness; but

Tom Putt was rather afeared about it, and he's in doubt now whether to go on courting that man's sister."

"There was a mystery," declared Grace. "Peter Norcot last saw his uncle alive on the Moor. Oh, John—to think of it! He is cruel, for he sets man-traps and spring-guns in his woods. A man who would do that would—he may be even a murderer! Under all his rhymes and nonsense he surely has a tiger's heart!"

"You mustn't think of it—either that he could do so wicked a deed, or that you are going to marry him. Most gentlefolks put man-traps in their preserves nowadays. But, to be honest, he don't, for I heard him tell master he didn't last time he was here. And as for you, the right man must soon come. He——"

"Stop there, John! 'Tis like your kind self to talk so to me; yet I know very well how it hurts you."

"Sweet!" he cried. "I have told you how I love you. I couldn't choke it down longer. And you forgave me, and pitied me a little. You must let me hope and pray for the right man, since 'tis impossible I can ever be anything to you."

Grace was silent, and he continued.

"I've learned better since that moment. I'm not a fool. My love at least is too big a pattern to offer it to you again."

"Can a man love a maid too much then?" she exclaimed.

"He may love too little and so offer himself. I love—there, my love's all of me. But who am I to dare to lift eyes to you?"

"'Tis just that, John," she said with a fluttering heart. "Who are you?"

"Until 'tis known——"

"What difference can that make? Can a fact not known alter a fact known? Mr. Norcot taught me that much. Facts never contradict themselves, he said once; and the fact is—you love me. If a king was your father, you still love me; and you are you—honest and true, and generous. And—and you've got a dear face like my dead brother's."

He stared in front of him, and Grace mused over his virtues. Suddenly he spoke.

"You'll make me mad again!" he cried. "I ought to spur away for dear life, and for honour and right; I ought to turn my back and gallop to the ends of the world; but I can't—I can't do it—more shame to me."

"You certainly love me with all your heart, John. Well, John dear, I think I love you too!"

"No, no," he said. "You must not; it can't be; 'tisn't in sober reason."

"So much more likely to be real," she answered. "True love is not reasonable, John. And you must fight a great battle for me, because all the world is against us."

"The world—the world's here—here! The rest I can put under my foot and forget. You love me—oh! Grace, my star—is it true?"

"Yes, for I've never felt so before, and I've done almost everything but fall in love in my time. 'Tis quite a new thing—sure it must be love; for what other name is there to give it? I love your beautiful face, and your voice, and your gentle ways; and I love you best of all for loving me, John."

"Every living thing loves you," he said solemnly. "Yet you can come to a useless, poor, humble man like me, and trust me with yourself!"

"Yes, I trust you, John," she said with gravity equal to his. "I know not what may betide; but you must stand between me and—and that man. Do you love me well enough to run risks and dangers for me?"

"May time prove it!"

"Your love is shield and buckler both to me," she said.

"And yours such a blessing as God Almighty never poured into any life before," he answered earnestly. "'Tis my prayer henceforth that I may lift myself up to be worthy."

"I love you with all my heart, indeed. And some day, far off, when the world rolls kinder and everybody's wiser, and Mr. Norcot is an angel or a married man—then I'll be your wife, John Lee."

The lad appeared more weighted by this mighty promise than jubilant at it.

"Do 'e call home all it means, my lovely?" he asked. "Do 'e know that your whole beautiful life rests on whether 'tis a wise deed or a vain one?"

Grace nodded.

"Love casts out all fear," she said.

"Then I can only fall back upon God to be on our side," he answered. "'Tis my life and light and heaven on earth to hear

you say that. Ay—you shall be my song for evermore. I'll try to live worthy of such bounty. There's no going back now—none, for I'm only flesh and blood, and Michael and all his angels shan't take 'e from me any more!"

Before she could speak he was close at her side and she felt his arm about her waist, his kisses raining upon her cheeks.

"For ever and ever, Grace!"

"Oh yes, dear John. Love never dies."

"If we could ride away over the hills now——" he said, dreaming his golden dream.

"We should meet Mr. Norcot, for there he comes," she answered.

"I feel that I should like to go to him and take him out of his saddle and crush him like an eggshell."

"My valiant sweetheart! You may indeed have to do so some day. Drop back now, dear John, and let my cheeks cool. Oh, how lovely a thing it is to have this mighty secret between us!"

"If I died now," he said, "I should have had far, far more than my share of the good of the world."

"Talk not of dying. You must live for me."

"That will I—and die for you if need be."

"We'll live and die together, John. Now fall you back, my own dear love—else Mr. Peter will grow jealous."

Thus it came about that when the manufacturer winked at young Lee and called him "a lucky dog," he uttered a great truth, although he was quite ignorant of the fact.

CHAPTER VI

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MR. NORCOT

A COMPANY all clad in black assembled at the dinner-table of Maurice Malherb. The family still mourned their hope, while Mr. Norcot's loss was even more recent. He bore himself with great correctness and resignation. The narrative of his uncle's sensational death was held back until later in the evening; but a matter more pressing filled Mr. Malherb's mind, and he hurried the ladies from the table when dessert was done, that he might open his project.

"How do you find Grace bear herself towards you now?" began the farmer abruptly, when he found himself alone with his future son-in-law.

"Alas! 'A fellow that lives in a windmill has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man lodged in a woman.' But I must be patient."

Malherb frowned.

"She's a fool—yet a fool may make the heart of the wise ache. Who shall escape a fool's folly if that fool be his daughter?"

"Tut, tut! Don't call her a fool. She is young—still in her halcyon hours. As Horace——"

"Listen to me, Peter. You are a reasonable man, and thank your God that it is so, for they grow rare. Now you will readily understand my feelings when my son died."

"I died myself when I pictured your sufferings, Mr. Malherb.

"'World-wasting Time, thou worker of our woes,
Thou keen-edged razor of our famous name.'"

"Even so. To be frank and avoid sentiment, I've put my life and soul into this place. I've made it a strong fortress for those to come. I have built and planted with my thoughts upon my

son. And then, while the mortar was a-drying and the young larches getting their first root-hold, he fell. Think of what that meant to me."

"My imagination can picture it. Death is so final. As Herrick says:—

" 'Man is a watch, wound up at first, but never
Wound up again : once down he's down for ever.' "

I have sympathised with all my soul."

"Then you must be practical and prove your sympathy. I had meant to write to you, but speech is more direct, and so I waited until we met. Now thus it stands. My son has passed away; my daughter remains."

"I have appreciated that. There was a verse writ on the Duchess of St. Albans by the Earl of Halifax for the toasting-glasses of the Kit-Cat Club. A word or two makes it exquisitely applicable:—

" 'The line Malherb, so long renown'd in arms,
Concludes with lustre in fair Grace's charms.
Her conquering eyes have made their race complete :
They rose in valour, and in beauty set.' "

"They mustn't set; that's the whole matter," answered Maurice Malherb. "I have sworn to my heart that set they shall not. My son is dead; my grandson remains a possibility—nay, a certainty, so far as anything human can be certain."

"Your grandson! You amaze me. Tut, tut! Was Noel married?"

"No! My grandson will be your firstborn. Where's the amazement in that? Two years hence you will be the father of a boy; and that boy I ask of you. Some might almost say I had right of possession, circumstances being what they are; but I am reasonable in my dealings, and just to all men. That boy I ask—nay, I beg. My heart yearns to the unborn lad. I live in the future always, for 'tis both true wisdom and true happiness to look ahead. The present generally proves cursedly disappointing to a sanguine soul. I gave you my daughter and you give me your son—your firstborn son. He will come hither; his name shall be Malherb; he succeeds me and founds the family which my own son would have founded. You catch my sense? 'Tis

but a link missed in the chain. I cannot believe that I am asking too great a thing. What say you?"

As a man of humour, Mr. Norcot always appreciated his present host. Now he kept a judicial face and laughed out of sight. His eyes were grave and his forehead wrinkled. He thought, of course, of Grace, but he did not mention her.

"You are the most original and gifted man it has been my fortune to meet. Even the crushing changes and chances of life leave you quite unperplexed. You evade them in a masterly manner by sheer quickness of perception. It is genius. Positively you do more than deserve success: you command it."

"Sleep upon the proposition, Peter, if you find it too great a thing to decide instantly."

"I see no need. I seldom find myself in a difference of opinion with Maurice Malherb. The phlegm with which I view the advent of this unborn man-child quite surprises me. Your idea is worthy of a big heart. I seem to feel it both just and honourable. These walls must not fall into alien hands when your work is done. That a son of mine should face the world as a Malherb and follow his grandfather's footsteps—what a privilege! To be honest, I have never much desired children, though doubtless the bachelor's heart expands when he is married, and the usual result follows. But now the case is altered. Tut, tut!

" 'Delightful task! to rear the tender thought,
To teach the young idea how to shoot';

and also how to ride, and to fish, and to be a gentleman. By 'young idea' I mean my son—your son. Yes, your son—to grow as you would have him grow, in the traditions of the Malherbs."

"Upon my soul, you might have been my son yourself!" said Malherb with stern exultation; "for you're the most level-headed man that ever I met."

"I have learned from you," said Peter modestly, "life is really not half so difficult as people make it. Wise sacrifice is the secret of success—nay, more, of happiness. Man cannot have his way all round. He doesn't grow in a flower-pot alone, but in a jungle of other living men and women—some stronger and some weaker than himself. Then let him sacrifice where he can't succeed. that where he can succeed he may succeed superlatively. Lop

off this limb, for that stout tree will bruise it; cut out these fine twigs, they will never get to the sun. But keep such and such a branch, for its way promises clear, and it can kill the weaker things if you only make it strong enough. Limit your aspirations, like a gardener limits his melons; but once determine where lies your strength, then throw heart and nerve and every pulse of life that way. Spare no pains, no brain-sweat, no toil there. Pour your life's blood out for that purpose. So you have taught me."

Mr. Malherb nodded with a satisfaction hardly concealed. It was a system remote from his own, as the unwavering light of the moon from fitful marsh fires; but Norcot knew well that he would not perceive the fact.

"Tenacity of purpose is vital to success," the elder man declared.

"Yes, it is so: our parts must limit our plans. I cannot do much. I have neither your intellect, nor education, nor power of driving many horses together; yet, what I can do—is done. My subjects are few, but I have mastered them and pursued them to the present limits of human knowledge. My ambitions are all gratified save the greatest."

"And you still short of forty! You were easily satisfied, Peter."

"Forgive me, but you would speak with more authority on that point did you know what my ambitions were. Accident gratified my penultimate desire two months ago. To achieve the supreme place at the Wool Manufactory was impossible by my own act, because a human life stood between; but my uncle perished; and now the thing I thought would be so sweet proves otherwise. 'Tis a sermon on the futility of human ambition."

"He was unfortunate in his wife. You must keep that sad story for the drawing-room. Annabel is most anxious to hear it. And your last ambition is Grace?"

"She is, indeed. She will, at least, exceed my highest hope."

"Her mother presses for a season in town."

"'Tis but natural that Mrs. Malherb should do so. Then 'farewell, a long farewell' to Peter Norcot."

"And too, too well the fair vermilion knew
And silver tincture of her cheeks, that drew
The love of every swain."

You don't read Marlowe?"

"You have my word. She might marry a Duke for that matter; but would a Duke make me a present of his firstborn son?"

"One may answer with absolute certainty that he would not, Mr. Malherb. In fact, the constitution of the realm—She is, however, of the stuff that Duchesses are made; I know that perfectly; while I can never hope to be more than a plain man—perhaps a knight and a member of Parliament, if all goes well—yet——"

"She is yours and she'll have an uncommonly good husband," said Mr. Malherb shortly. "Now talk of the farm. Did you note my sheep upon the Moor?"

"I did. They look most prosperous."

There's a rascally law here that denies me the right to pasture more cattle on the Forest than I can winter upon the farm. For the overplus I am called to pay as though a stranger to Venville's rights. A monstrous injustice, as I've told 'em. But to meet it I must build new great byres. Did you note the work?"

"I saw no new byres," answered Peter.

"Nay—I forgot. They are not yet begun. But so clearly do I view them in my mind, that for the moment I thought they existed already."

"You incur tremendous expenses."

"Why, naturally so. One does not come to Dartmoor empty-handed. To tame a desert and turn it into an important agricultural centre calls for capital among other things. Now let us join the ladies."

"Gladly," returned Mr. Norcot. "Those are the pleasantest words I can hear spoken under this roof. 'Tis not always so—but here. 'And beauty draws us with a single hair.' I wrote that to Grace when I heard that she had caught her first trout. She never answers my letters, by the way."

Presently the visitor told of his uncle's death. The story proved dramatic, and Mr. Norcot's method of delivering it was very deliberate and effective. Her kinsman's unhappy end specially interested Annabel, who had known him intimately in earlier days.

"You are to understand that the cloud fell upon my poor Uncle Norman when his wife left him. Some might have held her departure a happy circumstance, seeing the light nature of

the minx; he took his fortune differently. To us it may seem strange that any circumstances would make life unendurable—apart from the question of morals. Messenger has a word on that—a sort of answer to Hamlet.

“ ‘This life’s a fort committed to my trust,
Which I must not yield up till it be forced.’

Poor verse, but good sense. Well, there came a day when I made yet another attempt to lift my uncle from his deep despondency; and I thought that I had succeeded, for he consented to come upon the Moor and take his gun. I was to fish; he proposed to shoot duck—his favourite amusement in the old times. I rejoiced, little guessing his dark purpose. Indeed, who could have done so with a mind so lofty? What does Blair say in ‘The Grave’?

“ ‘Self-murder! Name it not; our island’s shame;
That makes her the reproach of neighb’ring states.’

It should be looked into, for the crime grows appallingly common. But a female is too often at the bottom of it. My uncle exhibited the utmost bitterness when his wife ran away from him. ‘Women are all alike,’ he said to me; and when a man says that, you know his luck has been to meet the exception. Never did Norman Norcot touch upon the deed in his mind, however, though Parson Haymes has since told me that upon one occasion he found it his duty severely to reprove my uncle for ideas favourable and lenient to suicide.

“To resume, he threw off dull care, as I fondly supposed, and went to the Moor for a day’s holiday along with me. I took my man, Reginald Mason; while a lad accompanied my uncle. Our plan was that I should fish the River Teign where it runs into the central vastness of the Moor beneath Sittaford Tor; while he proposed to shoot up the valley of the little Wallabrook, a stream that rises in the marshes beneath Wattern and joins the Teign near Scorhill. We were to meet at a lone dwelling by Teign Head, where lives a shepherd. There we designed to take luncheon; and my sister Gertrude had packed a goodly basket with such delicacies as we knew that our uncle most esteemed. There was a bottle of French burgundy at my order. ‘Tis bad for him,’ said Gertrude. ‘I know it,’ I replied, ‘but ’twill do him no hurt for once after hard exercise.’

"Mason left me at the junction of Teign and Wallabrook, and proceeded up the river to the place where we were to lunch three hours later. The boy, with uncle's great red dog and little black spaniel, went up to the head of the lesser stream, for he told this lad to work down towards him, and drive any birds that might rise into the lower reaches of the river. This plan Uncle Norman proposed, and I wondered at the time that he should make arrangements so unusual. For myself, I set up my rod and was a little impatient to get at the trout, for there chanced to be a good morning rise. But my uncle desired me to stop with him for a while, and of course I did so.

"At last we parted, and he made no ado about leave-taking, but compared his timepiece with mine and promised to be punctual at the luncheon tryst. I wetted my fly and had moved a hundred yards when he called me back and asked me for some string. 'My bootlace has broken,' he said. I had no such thing upon me, but cut off a yard of my line; then restored the cast of flies and left him apparently putting his boot in order. I never saw him again alive. When I had reached what I call 'the pool,' where Teign lies in long, still reaches between two waterfalls, I thought that I heard the faint report of a gun; and I smiled with satisfaction, little dreaming what had occurred.

"Punctual to the appointed time, I met Mason at Teign Head cot. But my uncle did not appear. An hour we waited; then came the boy and the dogs. The lad had also heard one report of a distant fowling-piece, but he had worked all the way down to our starting-place without seeing his master.

"Still I found myself not anxious. I partook of food, then went down the valley expecting to meet him at every turn. At last I reached the place where we had parted, and then Mason and the dogs together made that terrible discovery. You know the rest. My unhappy relative was reduced to the primal, 'porcelain clay of human kind.' He had slain himself by putting his weapon to his throat and pulling the trigger with his foot. My fishing-line had been used for that terrible purpose.

"'Ill news is wing'd with fate, and flies apace,' says Dryden. Before set of sun, as though carried on magic pinions, the whole little world of Chagford knew what had happened. It was a very trying time for me. My spirit sank. But for thoughts of Fox Tor Farm I could have relinquished my new responsibilities and

envied the eternal rest of the dead. I felt most dreadfully unsettled. Nothing mattered. The dubiety of mundane affairs was much borne in upon me. Reflections concerning the shortness and darkness of man's days crowded down like a fog upon my spirit. I felt as I never yet had felt, that

" 'The world's an inn, and death the journey's end.' "

Dryden again.

"There he lay in his life's blood—extinct and cold as ice. He had chosen to destroy himself within a hollow worked by the old-time miners. Great deliberation and forethought clearly marked his actions. Yet I am thankful that they brought it in as insanity; and, for my part, I am positive that the dear gentleman's mind had given way under his misfortunes. But there is no marrying nor giving in marriage where he is now."

Mrs. Mallierb wept silently as Peter finished his story. Then her husband spoke.

"He was a coward, and a coward is better out of the way. No human tribulations can justify the evasion of suicide. The man's duty had been to follow them, find his false lady, and, with proper formality, blow her lover's brains out, not his own. Go to the piano, Grace."

CHAPTER VII

THE SEVEN FAIL

THAT night the weather changed from fair to foul. Dense vapours descended upon the Moor, driving mists wrapped hill and valley; scarce a mountain thrust its crown above the gloom. For two days the rain prevailed and Grace was in some fear that the change would delay Peter Norcot and lengthen his stay at Fox Tor Farm; but when she whispered that belief to Kekewich in the breakfast parlour on the morning of their visitor's departure, the old man showed no fear.

"He'll go. He'm not the sort to change his plans for a scat o' rain. You'll be rids of him by noon."

"Oh Kek, when shall I be rids of him altogether?"

"'Twill be wiser to get rids of your dislike of the gentleman, Miss Grace. Master means to see you married by next Whitsuntide."

"Somebody will have to run away with me."

"There's many would be very willing, I doubt not. But them as runs away with a maid, will often run away from her come presently. In this here vile o' tears, the hard deed be the wisest, nine times out o' ten. You'm so butivul as a painted picture; but your sort is often miserable in their lives, just because 'love' be the first thought and only thought in every heart as sees 'em. So you pretty ones get to think that love be the sole thing as matters."

"I'm sure I don't, then; at least— I—oh, why do fathers plot and plan for us so? Is it right? Is it fair?"

"A grown-up faither must be wiser than a young giglet not out of her teens."

"Where's the wisdom of——?" began Grace; but her mother

appeared at this moment, and Mr. Norcot followed with the mast of Fox Tor Farm.

After breakfast the weather mended, and Malherb insisted that Peter should ride round the estate with him—a performance of which they had been disappointed on the previous day. Norcot obeyed and admired all things, but he ventured to doubt whether a plan for bringing water from a spring by way of an open conduit would serve the purpose in winter.

"It is like to freeze or choke with snow," he said.

"Nonsense!" answered Malherb. "Everybody here is always whining about what will happen come winter. Did not I see last winter here myself?"

"A very unusually mild one."

"Well, I don't fear it. But my men shiver at the name of it. It haunts their summer. They begin to see the phantom of it before September. Woodman and Beer are always crying about it. Is it not so, man?"

He addressed Mr. Beer, who was ploughing up potatoes with a yoke of oxen. The stalks had been drawn and collected in huge heaps, and now, with his coulter held close on the left of each row, Richard flung up fine tubers at every step, while Tom Putt, Mark Bickford, and several women, specially engaged for this important business, followed and filled the carts.

The crop was heavy, and Mr. Malherb regarded it triumphantly.

"These will astonish some of our neighbours, I fancy," he remarked.

"You must have brought this land with you!" commented Peter; and the farmer was constrained to admit that the soil had called for costly preparation.

The weather broke anon, and before midday the mist lifted sluggishly to the crowns of the hills, sulked there awhile, then prepared to roll down again.

At his parting meal Norcot had some speech with Grace and, afterwards, succeeded in winning a little conversation with her alone. She showed indifference and impatience. Then he interested her by describing his visit to Prince Town.

"The hero of the chisel honoured me with his attention. I am to do him a service if I can. He is a gentleman from the State of Vermont. He congratulated me on my fortune and I

expressed a hope that he might be at your wedding. If I win his parole for him, it is quite possible that he may be."

"I am resolved with all my soul and all my strength never, never to marry you, Peter; and you know it; and you are ungenerous and cruel to press it."

Mr. Norcot nodded thoughtfully.

"Nothing in the world like a hearty resolution," he answered. "'I have seen a woman resolve to be in the wrong all the days of her life; and by the help of her resolution, she has kept her word to a tittle.' But not so Grace Malherb. She is too sensible for that. I can leave my future happiness with absolute confidence in her little hands."

"My happiness is of no account!"

"Your happiness is my own. But let us return to Cecil Stark. A handsome and a gallant lad. He and his companions should enjoy parole without a doubt; and it may be that I shall assist them in that direction."

"You're a fool for your pains," declared Maurice Malherb, who entered at this moment. "Are there not enough of his kidney quartered all round about at Moreton, Tavistock, Ashburton and elsewhere? Certain of the Americans have broken their parole as it is. Conceive, if you can, the mind capable of such a crime. A dog has more sense of honour than these people."

"There are both heroes and rascals among them as amongst us all. You know my weakness for physical perfection. He was such a magnificent lad—Stark, I mean. And sailors always get upon the blind side of me. I find them so sterling and so simple. Of course, 'they that go down to the sea in ships, that do their business in great waters,' surprise one, since you might suppose that no man of intelligence would willingly select such a deplorable profession; yet I like 'em for their modesty and humble behaviour. I shall release Commodore Miller and the rest, I believe, if Lord Hamilton prove still my friend. He is *persona grata* with the Regent."

"And so is Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt at Tor Royal. I am almost minded to pit my influence against yours," said Malherb, half in jest, half in earnest. "I am myself privileged to know the Duke of Clarence, and at his table I was once honoured by meeting the Prince and received some flattering attention from him when he earned that I was a friend of Tyrwhitt."

"Oh, dad, don't!" pleaded Grace. "Let Peter free them if he can."

"And what interest have you in the matter, my dear?"

"Why, didn't the young man nearly knock my brains out? I have every right to be interested," declared his daughter.

Anon, Mr. Norcot set off for Chagford, and Grace, yielding to her father's wish, rode with him for some miles. Behind them followed John Lee and Thomas Putt. The former had come to escort Grace home again; the latter carried Mr. Norcot's luggage. As for Lee, Peter's well-knit figure and prosperous mien quite filled the forefront of his thoughts. His own helplessness especially crushed him when Norcot occupied his mind, and while Peter and Grace exchanged ideas, John kept a dark silence behind them, nor could Putt win any word from him.

At last Miss Malherb reached the turning-point and prepared to take her farewell.

"I wish you could find a reason for your coldness," said Norcot, as they drew up on the lonely heights of Bellever. "I'm a logical man. If you convinced me of error, it would be so different. But I have yet to know why I shouldn't love you and why you shouldn't marry me."

"I don't love you."

"Tut, tut! That's nothing. What a pitiful fellow should I be to let so small an accident frighten me from a noble purpose! Besides, 'don't' and 'won't' are very different words. Patience is my strong point, and you can't remain a child for ever."

"Words—words, Peter! I often wonder what your real life is behind so much talking."

"Marry me and find out."

"Never. You think I may love you presently. It is absolutely impossible, so spare yourself the delusion, and spare me."

"As to that, delusion is half the joy of life, and at least three parts of true love. Hear Waller. His address to the 'Mutable Fair' might do you good.

" 'For still to be deluded so,
Is all the pleasure lovers know;
Who, like good falconers, take delight,
Not in the quarry, but the flight.' "

Farewell, sweet Grace, until we meet again."

He bent over her hand in a very courtly fashion, and then set off for Chagford with Putt after him.

When they were out of sight Grace turned to her lover and quickly felt his arm round her, his gentle kisses upon her cheek.

"'Tis very well," she said; "but I can't live even on your kisses, sweetheart. This man quite overclouds my spirit. I gasp for air; I suffocate with quotations. You'll have to run away with me, John."

"Whither, my lovely Grace?"

"Why—to your grandmother. I'll dye myself nut-brown and pick snails for Lovey Lee."

Than her jest nothing had better served to show young John the futility of his hopes.

He groaned aloud.

"I have been mad," he said; "each day, each hour shows me how mad."

"Your love must find the way. Read some of my story-books. I'll warrant they'll hearten you. You are meant to do dashing deeds."

"Life falls out so different. What can I do? How shall I set about proving that I'm worthy to tie your shoe-string? The bitter truth is that I'm not."

"Now I see that Mr. Norcot has oppressed you as he oppresses me. I always feel not good enough, nor great enough to breathe the same air with him."

"But he is not good, nor yet great," John answered.

"Well, we stand where we did. You must see your grandmother and be firm with her. You are a man now. Approach her boldly upon the subject of your father. She knows all about you—more even than I do—'tis not to be endured. And if you cannot win her to our side, then I must. Just think how it might chance if she has the amphora!"

Upon this fascinating problem they spoke at length, and with such earnestness, that they forgot their love affairs for full five minutes. Not until familiar landmarks warned them that they neared their home again, did they become personal. Then John Lee's soul grew glad once more, and hope woke within him at her voice.

Peter Norcot, meantime, heard something of interest on his

homeward way. In a wild heath beyond Hameldon, he overtook two old men plodding along together, and as he possessed a remarkable memory, the horseman recollected one of them very well, and offered him greeting.

"How now, Mr. 'Ha'penny for a rook, a penny for a jay'! How wags the world with you? You forget me, but I remember Leaman Cloberry who showed me my road to Fox Tor Farm when I was fog-foundered a while ago."

"To be sure—an' they be reaping what they sowed there by all accounts—I mean where I took you."

"Reaping what you sowed more like," said Putt wrathfully. "If I'd caught you at your May-games wi' rats and moles up-along, I'd have broken your wicked neck—old as you be."

"Stuff an' nonsense!" answered Cloberry, "I never went nigh the place. 'Tis Childe's Tomb I speak of, not rats an' mice. 'Tis pulling down of holy crosses wi'out more thought than an honest man would draw a turnip. An' they lost their only son; and but for the mercy of God might have had their throats cut last night—eh, Uncle Smallridge?"

"'Tis so indeed, your honour," piped Uncle. "An' me the first to tell the news; for if they'd escaped, 'tis odds but they'd have fallen on man, woman, 'an childern; for they'm little better'n Red Injiins by all accounts."

"What is this aged but animated earth chattering about?" asked Peter.

"'Tis thanks to the watching Lord an' Cap'n Cottrell they didn't," declared Uncle. "But they tried, an' they'd a' gotten their devilish contrivances all ready; but the red-coats was too clever for 'em; an' now 'twill be bloody backs for every one of 'em; an' sarve 'em right, I say!"

"The old chap overruns his subject, your honour," explained Cloberry. "The matter be that last night but one, when the fog blowed up so thick an' sudden, a party of them Yankees to the War Prison concocted a wonnerful clever plan for escape. In the thick of the dimsy light they popped over the first wall wi' a very nice li'l ladder all made o' rabbit wire; but somehow—God he knows how—afore they could scale the outer wall, up ran Commander Cottrell an' his valiant men, as was snugly hidden away in a covered shed there. The armed sojers made every man Jack of 'em a prisoner in a moment. How the plot was found out an'

who told upon 'em han't known ; but somebody did for sure—else they'd a' got clean off—all seven of 'em."

"Fegs! 'tis a merciful escape for Dartymoor!" said Uncle Smallridge.

"Most interesting : but I hope 'twas not a young acquaintance of mine," answered Peter, "else I much fear my efforts upon his behalf will prove vain. Thank you, my men, for this remarkable news. Now let us sing 'Long live the King,' and Cottrell, long live he ; and here's a trifle to cool your throats when you have done so."

He handed a shilling to each man, and they clamoured blessings upon him.

"Always knowed you was a gentleman. An' may it be your turn next, sir," said Cloberry with great heartiness. "I only hopes you'll be in a proper tight fix some of these days and 'twill be my fortune to pull you out!"

"An' me, too," declared Uncle Smallridge, "for you'm one of the Lord's chosen heroes if ever I seed one. You can take an old man's word for't."

Within a fortnight, Norcot had succeeded in obtaining the privilege of parole for Commodore Jonathan Miller, Cecil Stark and William Burnham. But the boon arrived too late, for in response to the order came a communication, telling how these officers, together with four other men, had recently been captured in a bold attempt to break out of the War Prison. In what manner the authorities had learned their secret and hindered them, none knew ; but the result proved definite enough ; for the promise of parole was immediately withdrawn and all future hope of it denied.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN LEE'S FATHER

A WEEK after his latest recorded ride with Grace, John Lee visited Siward's Cross, to find his grandmother in a black and savage temper. Not only had she lost her money, but all chance of making more, because the Americans now firmly believed that Lovey Lee was the traitress, since she alone, beside the Seven, knew of their project and the time determined for it. This woman was quite innocent ; yet now, indeed, her sole regret centred in the fact that she had not betrayed them. But an unknown spy had taken the Government's money, and was richer by twenty guineas, while Lovey went poorer every way. How to regain the confidence of the prisoners was the problem before her, and she had not solved it on a day when John Lee came to her cabin. With him he brought some of his wages, and the silver served to comfort Mrs. Lee. She was half tempted to tell him her grievance, but natural caution arrested her. She held her peace concerning her private affairs ; then, by a sudden question, unconsciously led him into his.

"How do Malherb get on with Norcot? You can tell him from me that thick chap be built to be his master."

"'Tis the daughter he wants to master, not Mr. Malherb. She's promised to him. 'Tis all cut and dried in every mind but Miss Grace's."

"They won't ax her."

"To think of such a maiden being flung to a man she hates !"

"Stuff! She'll come round same as her betters afore her. He'll make her like him. Ban't he made o' money? Us all know that he be."

"She's wept tears against him a thousand times. She's a

Malherb too, with all her father's strength of will and fifty times his sense. She won't wed against her heart for any man."

"What do you know about her heart, Jack Lee? You'll be wise not to open your mouth so wide; else you'm like to lose your job."

"I'm not blind to hideous injustice."

"Nor me neither. The man who would rob the poor would sell his darter to the rich. His damn stone walls stretch out all around yon valleys now, an' my cows get the fat of the pasture no mor. I wish I could fret the flesh off his bones for it."

"Mr. Malherb has got his troubles and so much the more he wants to have his daughter off his hands and be free of her. The madness of the man! I learned from Kekewich, who is a very good friend to me, that he has already asked Norcot for his first-born to make him master of Fox Tor in the time to come. He looks that far ahead."

"The fool!"

"It shan't be while I live and can stand between her and the ruin of all her young life. I'm a man now—I——"

"Since when did you larn to talk so fine? An' who taught 'e?"

"Miss Malherb has been pleased to polish my speech. We—we are very good friends, thank God."

Lovey reflected over this curious remark. Then the matter in her mind was suddenly echoed upon his tongue and he put the familiar question.

"Grandmother, when are you going to tell me my father's name? I weary of asking you."

"You'm travelling fast," she answered; "long rides, an' mended speech, an' what else? She finds you're fair to see—'tis natural. Yet 'twill dash this crack-brained foolery when you know what you crave to know. For years I've kept that secret, hoping there was money hanging to it. But I don't see none."

"'Tis your duty to tell me now that I am a man."

"As to that—Do she want to know, or do you?"

"We both—at least——"

She caught him up.

"Ho-ho! An' what be you to her that she should care a rush who your faither was?"

"Well—a secret understanding——"

'Unknown to her faither?"

"'Tis so, but for God's sake, grandmother——"

"Say it out, then, or I'll peach. Come now——?"

"Will you swear before heaven to tell nobody—not a breath to any living soul?"

"I'll swear hard and fast—may my liver rot if I whisper it," said Lovey, already speculating what the lad's confession might be worth to Maurice Malherb.

"And you'll tell me my father's name?"

"As to that, yes. We'm prone to hunger after more truth than's pleasant to taste. An' what you want to know won't make you more light-hearted, nor yet that maiden, if she's been so daft as to turn her eyes to you. Your mother was my daughter Jane. Your faither was Norrington Malherb, the younger brother of Maurice Malherb, as died long since. So you stand cousin, wrong side the blanket, to that girl."

She watched his face grow pale and heard him groan.

"Only his faither, my old master, knowed, and that was why he paid me anything at all—cussed miser that he was. You wince, as if I'd thrashed 'e like I did when you was a boy. You'd better have bided ignorant."

"No, by God!" he swore. "'Twas right that I should know. My only grief is that you hid it so long. 'Twill break her heart."

Lovey jeered.

"If that's all your trouble, you can laugh again. Maids as ban't hardly growed to see their bosoms rounded don't break their hearts for men. You tell her, an' she'll find it very easy to forget you."

"She has promised to be my wife!"

"My stars! The moonshiney madness there is in children!"

"She loves me—she always will. We can't be more than mistress and man now. But she'll never think no worse of me; for this is no fault of mine."

Lovey Lee did not answer, but her mind worked busily. She was wondering whether she might be able to pluck profit out of this folly.

"You'm a proper man—none can gainsay it. Have 'e the pluck of a man? A church service an' the mumbo-jumbo of the parsons never yet kept the rickets out of a weakly babe, nor made the child of healthy folks more fair to see. Cuss the world, as must needs drag God A'mighty in by the ears to their

twopenny-ha'penny plans an' plots an' marryings ' Nature's made you a fine, shapely mate for any female. Maybe this wench——"

"No," he said; "I'm a gentleman at least. I cannot marry her now, and I will not. Fate has cast me into the world and has given me good blood, but it has denied the only thing that makes blood worth having. She can never be my wife; yet I may fight for her against the world; I may serve her well, please Heaven."

"Bah! What's the use of that knock-kneed twaddle? 'Tis for you to fight for yourself against the world and beat it at its own dirty games, not to whine about fate, just 'cause your faither an' mother didn't happen to be yoked but by their own healthy passions. Be a man! Can't it better to have noble blood in 'e, even o' the left hand, than wake and find yourself a labourer's son—heir to nought? Here's such a chance as might find you master of Fox Tor Farm in twenty years or less, if you was built of fighting stuff. What's the bar? None at all to any but a fool. There be Dukes of the Realm whose forbears comed in the world when a King of England cuddled an actress. Larn what happens an' take a big view of things. If you'm ashamed of yourself, then slink away an' cut your throat comfortable behind a haystack, an' get out of it. But if there's a pinch of your faither in you—not to name your gran'mother—then pick up the cards an' play 'em for all they be worth. Oh, I could almost wish I was a pretty lad like you be, to have the living of your life."

"I'm in a maze. I must get away with my thoughts; and I must speak to her."

"But don't speak what I've told you. Don't be such a born fool as that. Run away with her if there's one drop of lover's blood in you. Marry her; then play for Fox Tor Farm after; an' mind there's a lew corner by the fire for your poor starving gran'mother come she gets old."

He left her and went out with his head hung low and abiding grief upon his face. The woman's talk had not fired him; the thought of fighting and conquering the world did not quicken his pulses. He only saw the gulf for ever fixed between himself and Grace Malherb, and he was crushed. He felt not even curious to find out how she would receive the news. His own mind assured him that his determination could not waver. He must

leave the farm, and that immediately. He debated whether he should vanish away without a word. But such a step appeared both cruel and weak. Therefore he decided to tell Grace everything and then depart.

Lovey Lee meantime flung herself into the matter with great mental zest and an itching palm. Come what might, a lively promise of money rose out of this remarkable accident, and she foresaw encounters such as her soul loved between the strong and the feeble. Peter Norcot and Maurice Malherb were upon one side: Grace and the boy upon the other. Her natural instinct drew her to the powerful and the rich; then she reflected that in the long run Grace Malherb herself might prove the best mistress to follow. All depended upon the young woman's attitude towards John Lee's information; for that he would tell her the truth Lovey perceived, and that the girl's decision would presently reach her own ears she was also assured. Dismissing the matter, therefore, she returned to her former problems, and speculated how to convince the American prisoners that she had acted in good faith, and that the traitor to the enterprise must be sought inside the War Prison, and not outside it.

CHAPTER IX

GRACE MALHERB HEARS THE NEWS

HARVEY WOODMAN was ploughing with a team of six bullocks, and as he plodded behind them over the burnt ground, he sang a strange song understood of the cattle. It cheered them at their toil, and the low, monotonous notes sometimes broke suddenly, and leapt abruptly a whole octave upward. When the song stopped, the steers also stopped, nor would they resume their labour until the ploughman returned to his music. Beside Woodman tramped his son to turn the team when necessary. But they made poor ploughing through the heavy and ill-drained ground, and Maurice Malherb, who watched the operations from a distance, was alive to the fact. His personal unwisdom prompted the enterprise, for he was engaged in attempting to reclaim land that defied the effort; but, as usual, he set all blame upon other shoulders than his own. Now he approached Mr. Woodman and accosted him.

"You're not getting what you might out of those brutes. If you'd sing less and watch your work closer——"

"Ban't that, your honour—devil a bit will they go unless a man chants their proper song to 'em. 'Tis the nature of the earth, not the cattle."

"Nonsense. The land is no worse than the rest aloft there, that I've drained and pared and turned into fine fallow. The cattle go uneasily. I'll wager that fool blacksmith at Prince Town shod them ill." He examined the hoof of an ox as he spoke. The inside claws behind were 1 ft unprotected, but the outer ones had been carefully shod with iron. Malherb perceived that the work was good.

"Then he threw them carelessly, I'll wager. These big steers should be thrown with the greatest skill."

"To be just, your honour, 'twas very cleverly done, for I helped myself," answered Woodman.

The master turned away without another word. In his stormy mind of late there had been growing a darkness foreign to it. Dim suspicions, thrust aside only to reappear, shadowed his waking hours and haunted his pillow. From cursing ill success he had, by rare fits and starts, risen superior to his character and asked himself the reason for it. With impatience and an oath the answer was generally rapped out; but the question returned. In secret arcana of his heart, Maurice Malherb knew that he had acted with overmuch of haste. Thereupon he distributed the blame of his enterprise right and left; and chiefly he censured Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, in that the knight had always prophesied smooth things. Yet honesty reminded Malherb that while pursuing the suggestions of local men where it pleased him to do he had widely departed from the beaten track of experience in many directions. He remembered a recent interview with the owner of *Tor Royal*, and the words bluntly uttered then: that in certain particulars of husbandry Malherb attempted the impossible. The impossible, indeed, had always possessed a fatal charm for him. He had of late despatched cattle to *Bideford Fair* and sheep to that at *Bampton*—a matter of considerable expense in those days. But no prize nor commendation rewarded his undertaking. He was spending money still with but meagre return for it. He saw his means dwindling, and already the future of his family depended largely upon the success of a midland canal, in which Maurice Malherb, fired by glowing promises, had embarked a very large proportion of his capital. Canals were the rage amongst speculators a hundred years ago, but few sensibly succeeded; many were no more than the schemes of rascals and existed only upon paper.

Now this man, conscious of gathering troubles, lifted a corner of the veil that hid his spirit and looked upon himself. The spectacle was disquieting and made him first impatient, then sad. Angry he often was, but sadness before this apparition proved something of a new emotion. For a few fleeting moments he glimpsed the real and perceived that his own stubborn pride and boyish vanity were near the roots of life's repeated failures. For once, in the glare of a mental lightning-flash, he saw and understood; then his troubled eyes caught sight of flocks feeding in

the bosom of Cater's Beam; and Malherb's misery lifted. Scattered upon the hills like pearls, their fleeces washed to snowy whiteness by recent rain, the farmer saw his sheep; and they put heart into him, and dispelled the gloom begotten elsewhere. He turned his back on Harvey Woodman and failure; he stopped his ears to the cattle song, and looked out upon the Moor.

"The music of a sheep-bell rings my fortune," he reflected. "There lies my strength; that wool means high prosperity presently and an issue out of these perplexities."

Now his flocks represented the counsel of other men.

A moment later the master went his way with mended spirits, and as he entered his farmyard a grumbler met him. Mr. Putt revealed a face red to his sandy locks, while the rims of his eyes were even pinker than usual. Consciousness of wrong stared out of his face and he spoke with great feeling.

"I does my stint, God He knows. I work by night as well as day, but 'tis too much to be agged into a rage six times a week by they females, Dinah Beer an' t'other, just because I can't do miracles. Ban't my fault things go awry in the fowl-house; ban't in me to alter the laws of nature an'——"

"What's the matter? Despite your scanty vocabularies, all you men take a wearisome age to say what might be said in a minute. But if you had more words perhaps you would make shorter speeches."

"Ban't vocableries at all, axing your pardon, sir," said Tom Putt; "'tis rats—an' their breeding is no business of mine. I'm at 'em all the time wi' ferrets an' traps an' terriers; but they will have the chickens, for they'm legion. But what's the sense of Mary Woodman using sharp words to me? I do all that a man may. Look at the barnyard door next time you pass, your honour, an' you'll see varminths of all sizes an' shapes nailed against it. There's owls an' weasels, an' rats' tails by the score, an' martin-cats, an' hawks. I can't do no more; an' Leaman Cloberry hisself couldn't."

"Go your way. I'm satisfied that you work hard enough. We shall get 'em under presently. As to Cloberry—the old moth-eaten knave—let him not show his face to me while he shoots foxes."

"There was a brave gert fox round here two nights since," said Putt. "I heard un bark, an' he got short in his temper, too, when he found the ducks was out of reach. You could tell by the tone

of his voice that he was using the worst language he knowed. An' I told Miss Grace; an' her laughed an' said she could wish as he'd collared hold of a good fat bird for hisself and his family."

Mr. Malherb smiled grimly.

"Very right and proper," he said. "If any duck of mine will help a good fox to stand before hounds, he's welcome to it. Never touch a fox as ye hope to be saved, Thomas Putt. Thank the Lord cub-hunting begins in a fortnight."

Cheered by this reflection, the master proceeded about his business, and Putt went the round of the mole-traps to find not a few of Mr. Cloberry's "velvet-coats" dangling from the hazel switches that he had set. As he returned he met Grace about to start on her ride, and hearing of Mr. Putt's speech with the master, she bid him take to heart what her father had said. Then, turning to John Lee as they trotted out of sight into the wilderness, she continued upon the same matter.

"To think that within a few short weeks I may win my first brush! But a cub's little brush—it seems so unkind to kill the baby things. Still the baby hounds must be brought up in the way they should go—eh, John?"

But the young man's thoughts were far from foxes, because he was now to tell his lady of the conversation with Lovey Lee.

"You're sad," she said, as they rode over the Beam and descended into those heathery wastes that stretched south-east of it. "Even the thought of my first brush wins no enthusiasm from you. What's amiss, John? I fear that Lovey——?"

"Even so," he answered. "'Twas but the day before yesterday, and yet it seems long years since I heard it—my death-knell."

"What a word!"

"The true one. I only ask your leave to go. Bide here I cannot any more."

Grace looked very grave.

"What dreadful thing has fallen out?" she asked. "Whatever you have learned, it cannot make you other than you are. And it cannot surely make you love me less."

"My father was your father's brother, Grace—your Uncle Norrington, who died."

She did not answer, but stared before her. A flush lighted her cheek, but it was of exultation rather than dismay.

"You're a Malherb! How glorious."

He shook his head very sadly.

"Not I. My mother's name and my mother's shame is all my portion."

"Poor John—'tis hard to smart for others so. Yet—you're my own cousin."

"Don't think it. These things run by law, not by blood. I'm mere fatherless dust—not worthy to be trod upon by you. I can't live for you now, Grace; I might die for you; 'tis the highest fate I hope for."

She reflected for some moments, then answered—

"I do not see that the case is much altered. We had guessed at this, John; it hardly hurts me. We are still as we were. There is nothing between us that prevents me from being your wife."

"How ignorant you are of this cold, cursed world! You argue like an angel might that had never been beyond the gate of heaven. But we must face facts now. All is changed."

"Except my word and yours. I've promised to wed you; and a Malherb does not break promises. Don't I love you dearly? Tell me that I do."

"Right well I know it."

"Then that's your weapon against this cold world you speak of. You've got to make the world warm for yourself—and me; you've got to make the world forget this accident of birth. How are you different? You were born like any other. A man may be born to power; but no man is born great. 'Tis but an extra handicap and obstacle at the start. Oh, my brains are quick as lightning to-day! You must conquer this thing, as many great men have; you must see that it might have been ten thousand times worse. Your father was my father's favourite brother. He was a soldier and died in the wars. Now 'tis for you to make my father your friend. Then he gets you a commission in the Army. Then you go to the wars, and—oh, no, no—to think that I can say that! I who still wear black for my brother!"

But he saw her vision of himself—grown great despite his birth. He beheld himself winning a place in the world even worthy to offer her. He was young and sanguine, and her words had thrown a veil over the harsh truth. Yet his spirit sank.

"If such a thing could be!"

"Such things have been a thousand times. History is rich in them."

"I might do something, yet never anything great enough to offer to you."

"It must mean that you went far away, and I don't think I could let you go. And yet——"

"The thought is too grand even for hope. Who am I that I should ever win a commission in His Majesty's Army?"

"You are the son of a good soldier. The time cries for soldiers; but no, I couldn't let you—oh, dear, gentle John, I couldn't. Perchance Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt might—but I can't plot the details in cold blood, and I wish heartily I'd never thought of such a horrid idea at all. You shall not go to the wars for me. You must shine in a peaceful part."

"Fighting's the only sure quick way to success in these days. How to get Mr. Malherb's good word?"

"I've thought of that already. I've been thinking of it ever since you told me, and hating myself for thinking with such a hard heart. You've got a grandmother, and she is shrewdly suspected of a great crime. If, indeed, she robbed dear father, and you could prove it——"

"If I could find the amphora and bring it to him!"

"You must do so! That is what lies before you."

"But it may be all a dream, Grace."

"Then we must go on with the dream until we waken. Our love's no dream at least, and if one way won't serve, we will seek another."

"Honesty and right point the only way—for me: that leading out of your life."

"You are downcast and you try to make me so; but you shall not succeed, I promise you. Am I nobody, that you talk so easily of the road that leads away from me? Do you want to be off with the old love, John? Ah! Now I know what has fallen out: you've found a pretty girl and one easier to come by!"

"Don't—don't! 'Tis no time for jesting. My heart's breaking to see my duty so cruel plain."

"Your duty lies where your love is, and honour bids you keep your word to me before everything, John. And if you love me well enough to go into the world and fight for me, you shall; though 'tis my heart that will break, not yours, when I think of it. Thus it stands: you must win my father to your way and if good

chance helps you to bring him back his treasure, then so much the more quickly will you come to your reward."

"It may be so. Certainly there is some place that my grandmother used to haunt by night, and I know the direction."

"As a child she nearly killed you for spying; now, as a man, you must do the like again to better purpose. She can't whip you now."

"You will jest."

"The amphora is no jest. Secure it, and my father is under an eternal obligation."

"Would you have me ask for his daughter?"

"No, indeed; he would sling the amphora back in your face. But you ask—oh, that I should say it—for a commission. Yet, please God, the war will be done; and yet, again, if it is, whence are you going to win glory?"

"Glory!" He sighed and said no more.

"To be frank," continued Grace, "dear father would not keep the amphora now. He loves beautiful things, but he loves his farm better. He needs money. He looks so far ahead, that the present often finds him very straitened. Just now 'tis money he most wants, and you have to begin the campaign by finding twenty thousand pounds for him."

"I'll do my best—the Lord helping."

"And think not, dear John, that I am light of heart because my tongue wags so fast. I laugh, but my spirit is low enough when I remember all that these things must mean. Your life will be full of fret and fever and action; I shall have nothing but thought and hope to fill mine."

"I wish I could believe you. Your dangers will be real ones. If I departed, who is to stand between you and Peter Norcot? Since I am to fight, 'tis your battle, not the King's, that I long to enter into."

Grace shook her head.

"Have no fear for me, John; I can take good care of myself—of that I do assure you. Now tell me that no maid more practical and sensible and brave than I, ever set sail to face a sea of troubles."

Then fell silence between them for a long season, and there was no sound but the rasp of the dry, burnt heather twigs against their horses' feet.

CHAPTER X

HANGMAN'S HOLLOW

JOHN LEE entertained a very vivid recollection of the spot where his grandmother had turned on a moonlit night under Fox Tor, and beat him for daring to follow her. That her hiding-place was still the same he doubted not ; and now he determined to track the old woman down again, but with more stealth and skill than had marked his boyish operations.

Seven times he waited on the Moor beneath the hills, only to find each vigil unbroken save by the familiar shapes and voices of the night. Then two moons passed and the hunting season opened in earnest. It now became Lee's duty to ride his master's second horse, for Mr. Malherb was both a heavy weight and a hard rider. As for Grace, she approached the sport with all her father's ardour and quickly proved herself a brave and a brilliant horsewoman. Oftentimes she made John's heart sink, for she knew no fear ; then Maurice Malherb cautioned her for incurring of unnecessary risk, and in private John implored her to be more cautious.

"You are magnificent," he said. "'Tis a grand thing to see Mr. Malherb's face when he watches you ; but you are made of flesh and blood, not moonbeams ; and your horse, fine though he is, can only do what a horse may."

"'Tis so funny to hear dear father tell all men about his wonderful system of teaching ; while the sober truth is that you have taught me what I know," she answered. "Father rides well enough and with the courage of a lion ; but you—I love to hear them talk of it. Sir Thomas and the rest declare that you have the most perfect style on Dartmoor. Father has to thank you for much. You nurse his second horse marvellously."

"He is always most generous with his praise—and his half-guineas. I hate to take them," replied John.

Grace Malherb got her first brush in November. Then came a day when circumstances so fell out that she went to a meet with Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt and the house party from Tor Royal. Upon this occasion Mr. Malherb had business in Exeter and he rode thither at dawn with John Lee. It was understood that Grace might spend the night with friends at Holne, some miles from Fox Tor Farm.

An incident trivial in itself needs this much of elaboration, since mighty matters sprang from it. Maurice Malherb, his business of purchasing a new hunter happily completed, set off homeward in good spirits; while John Lee followed, riding his own horse and leading the new one.

Upon his return the master found that Grace had not come home; while John Lee, perceiving the night to be clear and lit by the moon, determined once again to keep a vigil for Lovey. He tumbled into bed soon after eight o'clock, slept soundly for three hours, then, as he had often done of late, arose, dressed in his thickest attire, left the loft wherein he lived and crept out of the house. Slipping from a side door, John was startled to hear footsteps, and, peeping cautiously over a gate that led to the stable-yard, he saw his master, booted and spurred. A moment later Maurice Malherb led a saddled horse from the stable, mounted it and cantered away.

John kept invisible until the other was gone; then, full of wonder at a circumstance quite beyond his experience, he left the farm and entered the Moor. The moon shone clearly, and there was frost in the air. Dew glimmered grey upon the dying herbage; and below in the valley waters murmured softly from a dense cloud of silver mist that hid them.

Now the object of Malherb's secret pilgrimage was one which he would sooner have perished than declare. The man's soft heart prompted him upon this mission; a simple matter of sentiment, hidden jealously from every eye, took him forth into the night. The morning kiss that he gave to Grace was always formal and cold; and if sometimes he stroked her hair or patted her soft cheek, he instantly assumed an attitude of indifference or said some harsh word, as though contemptuous of his own weakness. Annabel Malherb, affectionate and warm-hearted though she was,

possessed far more common-sense and infinitely more self-possession in matters of human affection than did her husband. She showed all that she felt and very properly passed for a gentle and a tender-hearted woman; he secreted his emotions and banked up volcanic fires out of sight. Thus he suffered as only those at once self-conscious and deeply feeling can suffer.

Upon returning from Exeter, Mr. Malherb supped with his wife and heard how Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt had called upon his homeward way after hunting and taken a dish of tea and a cordial.

"'Twas a very good run—one hour and twenty minutes. They killed upon East Dart, near Dury, and my lady Bastard had the brush."

"What of Grace?"

"Sir Thomas saw her once, well up. Doubtless she returned with the Fentons to Holne. Her things were sent in good time, for Dinah Beer went in to market there and took 'em with her."

"Yes, yes, of course," said the farmer, and spoke of other matters. Yet sleep refused to close his eyes; and while Annabel slumbered placidly enough, well knowing that her daughter was safe and happy, the father, equally sure of the fact in his reason, found a paternal instinct above reason keeping him awake and restless. He tossed to the right and left; he swore half-sleeping; then he started into wakefulness and saw his window full of moonlight. The illumination decided him. With a shamed face he stole from the side of his wife, and ten minutes later was ready to take the road. Creeping out of doors, he went to the stable, saddled a hack and rode off towards Holne village with a sulky and guilty satisfaction. The thought of any human eye upon him had driven him into a furious passion at once. He was ashamed of himself, yet well content to be upon this business.

Malherb trotted the four miles to Holne, fastened up his horse at the edge of a wood, and proceeded cautiously to the dwelling of the Fentons. Avoiding the front of the house, he presently reached the back premises. All was still, and he passed noiselessly to the window of the stables. The occasional thud of hoofs and snort of nostrils reached him from here. Moonlight illuminated the interior, and Malherb without difficulty saw what he wished to see. His daughter's hunter stood comfortable and asleep in its stall. For that sight alone the man had come, because it revealed to him how all was well with Grace. Some

great dog bayed, and leaped to the length of its chain with a rush and rattle, but before a sleepy voice from above bade it be silent, Malherb was far away. He hurried back through the trees to his horse, then returned homewards, happy. Other such human secrets as this were locked in the casket of his heart, and now, thinking upon the past, he remembered deeds to his account as a young husband and father. He growled impatiently and shook his head, for it vexed him that God's self should know those things.

Into the thread of the night's incidents Malherb anon returned, but for the moment it is necessary that we follow John Lee. Proceeding along the accustomed way, he hid closely where, beneath the inky blackness of a rock's shadow, it was possible for him to survey the shining vast, himself unseen. The sky twinkled with frosty stars to the horizon; the moon sailed high overhead. Then, almost before he had settled to his vigil, there came a sound out of the night, a rhythm of feet, that bore a lean grey figure who seemed woven of light and mist. It crept towards him; it promised to pass along the sheep-track within five yards of him; and Lee, with a tremor of boyish fear suddenly chilling his bones, shrank into the darkness and scarcely dared to breathe. Then Lovey Lee went past, and the light was in her eyes where they glimmered out of her white face, like jewels set in marble. Her breath came a little short, for she was moving fast. As one in sleep she swept along, staring before her, until her tall shape was swallowed up again within the pearly dimness of the Moor. The sound of her footsteps died upon his ear; the vision of her faded.

John Lee gave his grandmother a few minutes' start before he followed with extreme caution. For two miles he stalked the shadow of her, then, perceiving that she must presently enter a deep gorge known as Hangman's Hollow, where certain ruins of old mining works and blowing-houses still stood, he made a wide detour, mended his pace, and got to the neck of the coombe before her. Here he concealed himself again beside one of the rotting buildings, formerly used for smelting of tin. He hid behind a broken wall, and through a chink in it kept watch upon the ravine down which he had just hastened. Upon his left yawned a disused gravel-pit, where a labourer had hanged himself to a rowan tree and so given this sinister name to the spot.

Around about, dying brake-fern spread wanly under the night; and here and there flashed the white of a rabbit's scut as it hopped from its hole to the open and back again. On the watcher's right hand, deep sunk into the heather-clad earth, the bulk of an old blowing house still appeared; but one side had bulged and broken out, so that the whole stood like a shattered corpse of some habitation, and shone pallid there in its pall of grey lichens and rusty moss.

While still he panted after his run, and was vexed to see his breath steam into the moonlight, there came Lovey Lee slowly descending. She passed him, and turned the corner of the ruin where two broken walls rose with a shattered alley-way between them. Above towered the dome of the blowing house; beneath was a wilderness of broken stone.

John heard no sound, so he took off his boots, and, keeping in the shadow, peeped round the corner that Lovey had turned. But he saw nothing. The place was a narrow *cul-de-sac* and no visible exit offered from it; yet Lovey had quite vanished. Her grandson rubbed his eyes, then crept forward, and, growing bolder, searched every nook and cranny of the spot. But not one evidence of life rewarded him. Beneath, green sward sloped away at the embouchure of the combe, and a few sleeping sheep appeared dotted upon it, all misty and silver-grey. No shadow of his mysterious grandmother was visible. Again he searched without avail, then turned homeward—in haste to be gone. There was upon him now a cold and crawling sensation of dread. Witches and devils, hobgoblins and wer-wolves were dancing in his mind; each silent stock and stone that stared moon-tranced upon him seemed to hide some nocturnal thing of horror, some ghoul, or cacodemon. Impish atoms of life twisted and wriggled under his feet; the owl's cry uttered words of dark meaning to him: the night opened sudden unexpected eyes, and spirits that he had never known now jostled and elbowed poor John Lee. Even in his superstitious dread he felt a wave of shame when he thought of what Grace must say; yet he could not regain his courage immediately, for every time that the problem of his grandmother's disappearance turned uppermost in his mind there came an unnatural solution to it.

But had John Lee waited patiently with his eyes upon the

ruin, instead of flying so fast away, his fears had been stilled, and the mystery solved without any superhuman aid. Long before he reached home again Lovey had already reappeared, and was tramping back by the way that she had come.

Then the sound of a horse's feet fell suddenly upon her ear, and knowing that it was no wandering pony, but a mounted beast, she turned and saw the figure of Maurice Malherb approaching. The old woman's first instinct was to secrete herself, but time did not allow of it. The horseman had observed her and now reached her side. Indeed, annoyance quickly gave place to curiosity at this extraordinary apparition of him by night; and he felt no less surprise on meeting the ancient woman thus alone at such an hour.

"Lord defend us!" she cried. "What ghost be you stealing here afore cock-crow thus?"

"You know me well enough," he answered. "And you, you old miser? Going to visit your hoard, I'll wager—or else keeping an appointment with the Devil."

"Ess; only I've missed my gentleman. He's too busy to meet me this evening," she said; "but you'll do very well. An' so you ban't weary o' Dartymoor; but love it so dearly that you must wander here by night as well as day? Most of your sort be sick of the place before the moss begins to grow on the silly walls they build."

"There's no shepherd for sheep like the owner of them," said Malherb. "A good wether was slaughtered not long since. I'd pay handsomely to know whose belly bettered by him. There's a man called Jack Ketch for that work, Lovey Lee."

"You be fond of promising me a halter. See your own cursed tenper don't thrust your head into one afore long. You be all alike—your brother, an' him as be dead, an' my old skinflint master—robber that he was. But 'tis idle to cuss the dust."

"You've no call to curse Malherbs—you with twenty thousand pounds of my money stolen."

"You still think as I've got you're beggaring old pot?"

"I'll swear you had it; and I'd stake half its value that you have it yet."

"An' if I had? What better way of filling your eyes with twenty thousand pound all to once?"

"But not your own."

"Bah! If I had it, 'twould be my own, as much as my body an' bones be my own—mine to make or mar—to cherish or put under my feet."

"I'll swear your hag's eyes have mirrored it this night!" cried Malherb. "I see you licking your lips as though you had just come from a feast."

"If 'twas so, 'tis a feast as I won't ax you to share."

"Nevertheless, I shall share it some day unasked."

"You'm welcome; but the day you see the Malherb amphora again will be the last day you see anything."

"You've got it then?"

"Why, as to that—since there be no witness here but your horse—I can speak. Ess, I've got it safe enough. 'Tis my family to me, my fire, my food, my heaven. I catch heat from it in the cold: it feeds me when I be hungry; it fires my blood same as liquor would. I hug it like a lover an' it makes me young again. But you—you that have lifted walls between my cattle an' their best grazing ground—you that have cursed me and promised to hang me—you that be what is worst in every generation of your race rolled into one—you may ax an' pray to all the devils of hell for your amphora; an' they'll sooner give it back to you than ever I shall!"

Malherb preserved a very remarkable restraint under these insults.

"As usual, my judgment is confirmed," he said. "You hold my treasure and deny me possession. So be it. But you must die some day, Lovey Lee. Now let us discuss the future."

"Never—never," she screamed. "Die—who be you talking to? I ban't built to die. I'm all steel springs and tough as osiers. Not a sense failing, an' power to do a man's work when I will. I'll last out you an' your brood, never fear; I'll live to see your blasted walls in the dust yet an' your body resting on the Coffin Stone up Dartmeet Hill. Don't fox yourself to think I'm going to die afore you. An' when that time does come an' I know that I've got to go, I'll scat your toy to little bits—pound it to dust an' eat it—eat twenty thousand pounds! I've thought of that—I, that live on snails an' efts, will make me such a meal as no human has ever made. You! I'd rather fling the glass under the hammers at the tin mine afore you should touch it or see it more."

"A ducking-stool would do you good, you foul-mouthed old witch," he said. "Be very sure your secret's out now and the end of you is not far off."

"You're a fool to think so. You'll tell the world I've got your amphora? And I'll say I have not. You'll say that I confessed to it, and I'll ax when? You'll say upon the middle of Dartmoor at a moonshiney midnight! An' the neighbours will reckon another fool be taking to drink to drown his troubles. Get home to your wife! Be you faithless to her, too, along of your other faults? Go; throw over more crosses till the curse of God's ripe for you! An' do me a hurt at your eternal peril. Your son be took, but lift one finger against me, an' by the God as made us both evil, I'll ruin your daughter's life. 'Tis in my power to do it, so I can hit you harder than you can hit me."

She stood still a moment, then turned her back upon him, and hastened down a stony place into the darkness. He watched her climb out upon the other side and fade into night. For a moment his rage prompted him to gallop after her, but he changed his mind and turned homeward.

A grand problem filled the foreground of his life from that moment. Daily his circumstances grew more straitened, and that morning he had felt shamed in secret to spend fifty guineas on a new hunter. Yet now twenty thousand pounds seemed almost within reach again. He doubted not that his amphora was hidden upon Dartmoor, and felt positive that the historical jewel of the Malherbs must soon return to his possession. Already he planned the spending of the money.

In olden times this man would have thought it no sin to torture the truth out of Lovey Lee by rack or red-hot iron. Now he concerned himself with other ways of solving the problem. Stealthily he returned home, stalled his horse and rubbed it down, then crept back to bed. His mind was occupied with fair means to recover his amphora. As for the miser's threats, they were forgotten. He had as yet met no woman capable of opposing herself successfully to his determination.

CHAPTER XI

FREE

WHILE John Lee carried his experience of the night to Grace at the first opportunity, Malherb told no man of the nocturnal meeting with Lovey. He turned his secret over, and between intervals of hunting and of work, held deep speculation with himself how best to circumvent the miser. Vaguely he dreamed of cunning traps and surprises, but such warfare was foreign to Maurice Malherb, and his mind lent itself to no subtlety in that sort. Nor would he ask assistance of any man; for, though he thought upon Peter Norcot more than once, and might, indeed, have made no better choice, yet pride rebelled before the spectacle of himself seeking aid to outwit a woman. That he would recover Lovey's stolen treasure the master felt positive; but no means of doing so immediately appeared.

John Lee, meanwhile, had less than Malherb's knowledge in one direction, much more in another. That the amphora was actually in his grandmother's possession he did not guess; but the locality of her hidden haunt he had discovered. All that he knew Grace now learnt, and her mind awoke into great enthusiasm.

"'And then she vanished'! No, no, dear John; people don't vanish—not even mysterious, savage old misers like Lovey. She went somewhere out of your sight and out of your reach for the present; but flesh and blood cannot vanish," said Grace very seriously.

"There were witches in the Bible, and there may be on Dartmoor," he answered. "Not that I'm afear'd any more. I'm going to hunt Hangman's Hollow every moment of my spare time henceforth. All the future depends on it for me, and for you,

and for Mr. Malherb also, since you say that without money things must fall out hardly in a year or so."

Yet, despite John Lee's great resolutions, a chance unforeseen came now to thwart them, and it was many weeks before any human foot explored the desolate ravine that hid Lovey Lee's secrets. As though to convince the master of Fox Tor Farm that the moor-men did well to fear winter, terrific weather fell upon the upland waste. Long weeks of sulky black frost ended in white frost. From lowering skies the sun crept forth above the undulation of Cater's Beam; but his direct rays proved powerless to thaw the ground. Each night the frost bit deeper; each morning the cattle byres were coated with ice from the frozen breath of the kine. Work was suspended, and the world seemed a thing perished and insensible to any further touch of life. Then, after a cloudless week, the wind, that had puffed fitfully as it listed, yet never found a cloud to drive along the pale azure floors of heaven, went north and stopped there. Now the frost abated by a degree or two, but still remained severe and, from day to day, feathers and films of cloud swept southerly. For some time these vanished before nightfall; then they increased and a few light snow-showers fell. They heralded a notable and terrific blizzard, whose sustained fury burst upon the Moor, swallowed its boundaries, buried its lonely heart and piled mighty barriers of snow between the central waste and all civilisation. Fox Tor Farm was well equipped for such a siege; but many an isolated homestead, now surprised by weather beyond man's memory to parallel, found itself much straitened until the thaw.

At one place above all others this avalanche of snow brought with it deep concern and anxiety. In the War Prison, Commandant Cottrell and his staff, with ten thousand men to feed, found great problems threatening their peace. Supplies promised quickly to run short, and even the store of sealed provisions set aside for any possible emergency, represented little more than a week's fare for the hosts of Americans and French. Within three days of the great isolation food was being nursed and rations were decreased—a hardship terrible at such a time. But unutterable suffering and woe beyond words marked these black weeks at Prince Town. Infinite cold settled upon the waste, and thousands of prisoners stuck all day to their hammocks,

leaving them only at the hour of meals. All buying and selling had been suspended, for the country-folk now possessed nothing they could part from. Within the Wa. Prison order and discipline were scarce maintained beneath the strain; death reigned at the hospital, and nimity of human misery found an end in the frozen earth.

The tempest that followed upon this arctic weather deeply affected the fortunes of the Seven. After some weeks of imprisonment in the cachots, Cecil Stark and his companions rejoined their compatriots in Prison No. 4. What had happened to defeat their scheme they knew not, and no thought of treachery amongst their comrades darkened a single heart, because every man supposed that Lovey Lee had betrayed them. For a time after their failure each held aloof from the rest, since suspicious eyes now closely marked their actions. Then came a meeting with Captain Cottrell, and immediately after their liberation, the three officers, Miller, Stark and Burnham, were summoned before the Commandant.

They appeared and for the first time learnt that Peter Norcot had availed with the authorities.

"But those who break prison would break parole," said Cottrell drily. "Therefore upon my report, gentlemen, and as the result of your own folly, the privileges that a generous Government was prepared to extend to you are now denied."

Commodore Miller answered for the Americans.

"Little need be said to what you tell us, Captain Cottrell. We stand under a deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Norcot, for his generous and disinterested effort on our behalf; and our failure to make good escape will not unnaturally be punished by a withdrawal of the privilege of parole. One other point only of your remarks challenges my comment, and that I would willingly avoid, since it is no wish of ours to quarrel personally with any man in authority. But when you say that those who would break prison would break parole, I declare that you speak for yourself, and not for these gentlemen, or for me. We are honourable men and the prisoners of an honourable country but you—by these words you have proclaimed yourself a mean and base soul, not worthy either to have the control of gentlemen, or to mingle with them."

The Commodore spoke with calm self-restraint, and upon the

silence that followed his rebuke struck Stark with somewhat less careful choice of words.

"Every man has a right to regain his liberty at any cost ; but no man has a right to tell a lie and break a solemn oath. You are much to be pitied, Commandant, in that you, who call yourself an officer and a gentleman, can confuse such widely different issues."

The soldier gnawed his moustache and grew red.

"I stand corrected," he said. "So many of your countrymen have committed this crime of breaking their parole, that I assumed the issues were not regarded as opposite in the American mind. Commodore Miller, I pray that you will accept my apologies, and I shall be very happy after the war is ended, to give you every satisfaction."

"It is enough," said Miller. "I would that you could extend your ready sense of justice to the parole now tended to us by authority ; but that, of course, is a question for your personal judgment."

"In that connection no apology is needed nor will be offered," returned the other. "Had you escaped, the onus of the achievement must have fallen upon my shoulders. I had possibly been cashiered."

"Since we are on it, Captain Cottrell," said Stark, "may I, as a sportsman and in good faith, inquire how you discovered our enterprise and knew so punctually both when and where we should endeavour to depart?"

"What ! the informer's name ? Surely you know that informers are sacred in this world, whatever may be their fate in the next ?"

"This much at least I beg you to tell us, if you hold it square with duty. Was it from within or from without that we were struck ? We may desire to try again, and it is well to know friend from foe."

Captain Cottrell laughed at the bold question. He reflected a moment, then made reply.

"You've preached me a sermon on honour, and I'll pay for it with a word of advice. A man's worst foes shall be they of his own household. There's a seed to sow in your heart, Mr. Stark ! But since you will have it, then take it. At least I trust that it may serve to break up a little family party of Seven which I hear about. It will be better for all concerned that you respect

the prison regulations henceforth. Now, gentlemen, I wish you a very good day."

In darkness and indignation they departed before this cynical speech. Stark and Burnham were for disbelieving it utterly; Commodore Miller, more cautious and more experienced, deemed the assertion not one to ignore without serious reflections.

"'Tis a patent lie," declared Stark. "I marvel that you cannot see it, sir. He actually dared to declare his object in uttering it. He wished to separate the Seven and scatter them finally. What more certain way of so doing than by making each distrust the rest?"

"We shall only doubt each other, however, if we believe him," said William Burnham.

"Yet I will not say offhand that he lied," answered the Commodore.

Thus the cloud worked to bitterness from the outset. Four of the Seven, their hearts fouled by racial prejudice, swore that Cuffee was the culprit; while the Commodore supported poor Sam, and Stark staked his own honesty and honour upon the negro's. Acrimonious conversations passed among them, and it seemed that Commandant Cottrell had fully effected his purpose; but then came the awful weather, and certain necessary relaxations called for by its severity, now drew the old friends together again in hope of escape.

The cold had long reduced all exercise in the open, and through the greater part of every day the prisoners collected by thousands in the chambers immediately beneath the roof of each main building. Here, through the windows, a wide survey of the surrounding country offered, and Stark and his friends often noted the visible contours of the land, and realised to some extent the accuracy of Lovey Lee's maps. They learned also of a matter more interesting and nearer at hand. The boxes upon the inner wall were empty, for one soldier had already perished of frost-bite on sentry-go, and two others were at the door of death. To stand in the open air for half an hour was a proceeding so dangerous that the inner wall now remained unguarded save by its automatic protection of bells and wires.

Upon the occasion of the blizzard, while yet nature waited in frozen silence and the north grew black at midday, six of the seven, taking their lives in their hands, made a second effort to

escape. David Leverett alone had no share in the enterprise, for he was sick of a chill and kept his bed in the hospital. Burnham and Stark demurred whether they might in honour repeat their attempt without him, but Commodore Miller decided that the greatest good to the greatest number must determine their action. They were all sailors, and failing the apparatus of a wire ladder, employed in their first experiment, they designed a living ladder that could be quickly built up of their own persons. The manœuvre was not difficult, and they practised it out of sight of the sentries until each man well knew his place and part in it.

At the fall of evening, while yet faint grey light marked the western sky and the snow had only just begun to fall, many men went into the yards for water. This, in the shape of ice, they conveyed to the prisons, and each party in turn broke a portion from their frozen conduits and fled back shivering into the fetid warmth of the great buildings. The guards and the guarded alike shrank from the open air, and in that hour before the storm, a hundred men might have climbed out of the prison with no eye to mark their going. But the weather made escape suicide; the north wind and the snow were the gaolers of Dartmoor for many a day henceforth.

Separating themselves from the throng, Commodore Miller and his companions departed one by one and presently assembled behind the angle of an empty cachot. From here they approached the inner wall, and, while the blood was still warm in them, set about their task. The square and solid shape of James Knapps came first, Sam Cuffee leapt to his shoulders, Stark followed, and then came Burnham, while the Commodore next worked his way up the living ladder; and the light and weakly person of Caleb Carberry brought up the rear. Once the warning bells jangled, but the wind swept the sound away, and no turnkey heard them. The darkness began to close in quickly, while far above ruddy splashes of light blazed like fierce eyes from the squat windows of the prison.

The difficulty of the ascension was quickly tackled and mastered. With Knapps centred the chief strain, but despite his weight the man proved nimble enough, and though he bruised both Cuffee and Stark not a little as he clambered over them, soon Jimmy reached the top. Then the negro, full of muffled regrets at his clumsy feet and hands, also went aloft, and within three minutes

of the start the whole six had safely passed the inner wall. Descent from this was easy, for steps rose upon the outer side of it and communicated with the sentry-boxes along the top. Now snow fell upon them in great solitary flakes, and they got a glimpse of inky cloud-banks swallowing the Moor to windward; then they hurried down into the great fosse beneath them, crossed it and prepared to scale the outer wall.

Up they went, though more slowly than before, for the cold began to touch them. Soon they crowded in a row aloft like forlorn birds; then they felt the full force of the wind, and stood aghast at the grim desolation spread beneath.

"Get to earth, lads, while we can use our hands," shouted Miller. "Once free, we'll speak a word or two as we move south. When we are down, each man must determine for himself his course of action. We can either follow the wall round to the main entrance and give ourselves up to the guard again, or we can turn our faces to the night and trust in God."

No man answered, but the living ladder was formed, and Knapps, taking a firm grip of the wall, lowered himself half over. Cuffee slipped down and held the sailor's ankles, and the others, one by one, thus lowered themselves to the ground. Then Knapps, hanging to the full extent of his reach, let go, and those on the ground stood by to break his fall.

Now, face to face with night and tempest, the character of each among that little throng appeared, stripped bare by circumstance.

Cuffee was the first to speak. He already wept and whined, as the wind cut him to the bone, and the snow sweeping horizontally over the heath stung through his rags.

"For de lub ob Gard, sars, I'se go back afore I've froze into one lump ob black ice! Oh, gemmen, we run quick, else we nebber run no more!"

"The chances of life are small," said Miller, "and no man will think the worse of another if he turns to the gates. The storm promises to be terrific, and though we might have reached Lovey Lee's cottage in weather still and clear, 'tis but a forlorn hope now. We are to hold on until we strike young plantations of larch and beech. These we leave on our left, and then keep south-east. 'Tis seeking a needle in a bottle of hay, and failure must mean death. Let no man start in ignorance."

"For God's sake be moving, sir," pleaded Burnham. "Whatever happens, we must get abreast of the main gates. Then those who will may go to the Moor. We shall freeze here while we stand. For my part I return. Life is sweet."

"An' me too," said Carberry. "I'm fearsome of this weather. My lungs will fail me in a mile. 'Tain't no manner of use killing myself for nought. I wants ter see the gate again. 'T'other side the wall's only prison, but this side's death."

"I'se with you, Marse Burnham and Marse Carberry," chattered Cuffee. "My legs is gwine so funny, like as if dey belonged to some udder gemman."

"It's suicide, Stark," said Burnham, as they bent forward and followed the wall. The wind now shrieked past them, and the snow began to change its character. It had been very thick and heavy, and the Moor was already an inch deep under it; but the flakes ceased to fall, and dwindled into an icy dust that stabbed like a rain of needles. Darkness increased: only by the wall upon their right hands did they know their road.

"My cheek him froze hard!" cried the negro. "Oh, my poor mammy!"

Stark, with his head down, spoke to Miller.

"What do you do, sir?" he asked. "I'm going to make a fight for it; but dare you?"

"I'll come, lad, on one condition: that you do not stay a single step for me. 'Tis each for himself. My life matters to no man. And I take it into my hands with all reverence for the Giver. If I die, I die a free man."

"'Tis so with me," answered the younger: "none will mourn me, for sorrow of heirs is only laughter under a mask. But we'll win, not lose. And 'tis victory either way, whether we live or die."

There remained James Knapps, and now Stark asked him his purpose.

"Waal, I reythar guess I'll hold on," he answered. "I ain't frightened of snow and never stopped hum nights when I could go out. I was a trapper in the Rockies once. This weather is old company, and no man kin tell what's behind sich a smother. Death or I, 'tis no great odds to me; so I'm for going ahead."

"I hope it don't displeasure you us turning back," panted Caleb Carberry to Stark: "but I'm very wishful ter get home again some day. I've got a wife and family in Vermont——"

"Then you'd be a knave to hold on," said the other. "I've got nothing in Vermont but a good solid chunk of the State itself. The beavers won't miss me, nor yet the maple trees, nor yet my cousins, I'll swear."

When the glare from a great lamp above the main entrance was seen across the snow, three men huddled together in an empty sentry-box near the gates, and three struck strongly forward into the south-east. They held a steady course, and walked in Indian file, with the storm on their left sides.

Sam Cuffee sobbed and screamed.

"Poor tings, dey got der marching orders! I nebber see Marse Stark any more. I wish I born dead!"

"Shut your mouth, you black scorpion," said Burnham savagely. His heart was with his friends, and now he smarted to think that he had turned. If they lived, they would never respect him more. So he believed. He had always entertained a lively jealousy where Stark was concerned. He knew that his messmate was a better man than himself and, eaten by envy, could not pardon his superiority. Now in his heart there sprang a base and fleeting hope that Stark had departed to die.

"I'se no scorpion," answered Cuffee. "I'se only berry dam miserable nigger, sar."

"Be silent! Do you want the men in the guardhouse to hear us? We're to give Commodore Miller as much law as we dare without getting ourselves frostbitten. Then we can ring the bell and sneak back to kennel—like the hounds we are."

"To the cachot," said Carberry. "I kinder guess we'll sleep on granite to-night. Snow's softer and warmer, after all's said. But if we sleep here, you bet we shan't wake no more."

"They'll have a pretty down on us now," answered Burnham. "We were fools not to go and die with the others."

"De cachot—wid de snow coming in to bury us froo de naked windows! Oh, I wish I dead and in hell—it warm dar. I no care for twenty million debbils so long as dey take me into de warm place."

"You'll be warm enough to-morrow. They'll flog us for this when we refuse to say anything about the others," returned William Burnham.

"Flogging's better'n dying. Durn the silly monkeys—they might just as well have cut their throats as go," declared Carberry.

"I dare say every doodle of 'em's dead by now. Miller's a loss to the country for sartain."

In silence they waited another minute ; then Burnham addressed Sam Cuffee.

"Ring the great bell, nigger ; I can't lift my hand to it."

Soon the three were back again within the prison walls, and as Carberry had expected, a cachot opened frozen jaws for them. Untold misery they endured, although a soldier at his own risk fetched them a bundle of straw to spread between their bodies and the stones. Commandant Cottrell himself directed the punishment.

"As for the others," he said, "we are well quit of the troublesome rascals. They'll be out of further mischief before dawn. Nothing could live in this, for Satan and all his angels are loose to-night."

CHAPTER XII

THE SNOWSTORM

NOW through the bursting heart of that great storm the American prisoners struggled on their way. None spoke ; for all believed that death strode beside them and came closer with each savage thrust of the northern wind. About them the snow already lay in a heavy carpet and upon the Moor, in gorges and old, deep ravines, an icy dust was piling into drifts that would only vanish with the suns of April. The gale blew with gigantic but irregular outbursts, so that it seemed as if fingers invisible on cruel hands stretched out of the night to tear their garments off them. The spirit of the storm escaped from its icy chambers, swept chill around them, and each breath they drew cut sharp to their lungs as the men panted onward.

South of Prince Town roll high and open heaths, whereon, under the tremendous impetus of the tempest, the snow was swept horizontally. It fell, only to be gathered up again and launched forward in writhing wisps and veils. Along these level heights Commodore Miller, Stark, and Knapps made their way ; then when each heart sank low and every sanguine pulse was nearly frozen, they touched the skirts of the young plantations at Tor Royal and hoped again. Half a mile distant the hospitality of Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt had been at their command, and the knight had gladly closed stout doors between the wanderers and death ; but of the establishment within these snow-bound young forests they knew nothing. Their thought was the cabin of Lovey Lee, concerning the position of which she had made them clear ; and now they held on to the end of the wood, then turned a compass-point southward and faced the Moor again.

Cecil Stark at length spoke, and shouted into the Commodore's ear.

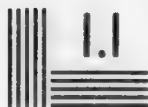


MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



1.0



1.1



1.25



1.4



1.6



2.8



2.5



3.2



2.2



3.6



2.0



4.0



2.0



1.8



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

260 MAIN STREET
MILFORD, MA 01904
TEL: (617) 879-4000
FAX: (617) 879-4001

"We're on the right road. We may pull through after all."

"Save your breath and keep together," answered the older man. "I have some fight in me yet."

"And you, Jimmy?"

"I wish I was ter prison."

"Blame yourself that you're not," panted Stark.

"I duz," answered the sailor. "I s'pose there's no grizzly bars snooking around these parts? I thought I squinted something back away."

"No; but there are stone crosses; and one stands nigh Lovey Lee's. Hit that and we're saved."

"Miss it and—but no use to wherrit. 'Tis a very good end. I knew a chap as slept hisself out of life very comfortable on such a night. Narry a pang; and I found him in the morning froze to the marrow, and smiling about it, like he was a statue in church. Better than a bagonet in your belly, anyhow."

"Drop that talk, bo'sun. We'll win yet!"

They fought on silently, but the pace became slower as their force abated and the snow increased. Now they felt the full strength of the wind, and nature instinctively made them turn and edge away from it.

"Hold to your left, lads, or we are done for!" cried Miller. "Keep the wind on the port bow."

"Be damned if I kin suffer it against my cheek any more," answered Knapps. "My ear and jaw are just frozen and my left eye's bunged up with ice."

Twice more Stark addressed the sailor, but received no answer. Then, turning again, he found one shadow beside him instead of two.

"Is that you, Stark?"

"Ay, sir."

"Where's Knapps?"

"I'm afraid he's lost, sir. He would hold off a point. Had I sought him, I must have lost you."

"Shout—shout with all your might. We may save him yet."

They lifted their voices, but the piping of them was gulfed in the roar of the wind. The ice poured out of the darkness, and, despite the snow-blink, an awful circumambient gloom hid all things from their eyes. Only the wan upthrown illumination at their feet told of the snow beneath.

"I implore you to be moving, sir. Right or wrong, we must hold on now," cried Stark, for he saw that his companion seemed to hesitate.

"Knapps may be right. Can we have got too far east? However, 'tis all one. Blessed sleep's ahead, my poor boy. 'Tis good to die in the great Hand of God and not behind stone walls."

"Don't speak of dying, Commodore. Get closer; take my arm and husband your strength as you may."

Stark closed up on the other's left hand between his friend and the weather: but Miller appreciated the action and fought against it.

"You shall not do this for me. I'm tougher, older, better seasoned!"

"For love of life, speak no more," Stark answered. "Hold close. We may save each other."

Now arm in arm, or sometimes hand in hand, but never apart, they battled through a dread hour of agony. Often they fell and bruised themselves upon ice and granite; often they dropped headlong into some snow-hidden rift; then surmounting it, they struggled on again, half blind, half strangled. Despite their tremendous exertions, no warmth to fight the wind, no heat of blood could either generate. They froze as they fought and their progress became very slow. They grew conscious of sloping land and passed where hills of stone rose to the right, while the storm, from lower levels, leapt upwards as it seemed out of some dark crater on the left of them. They had missed Siward's Cross by miles and now wandered under Fox Tor above the Mire. Each yearned to lie down and end it; and each knew that a longing to yield was in the heart of the other. For a moment they stood in deep snow where great rocks towered and broke the wind. Then Commodore Miller addressed Stark, and his dreamy, placid utterance sounded strange in the fury of the hour. Shouts and a frenzy of fear or of energy had better chimed with the free and fearful forces of the air; but the American spoke like a spirit and looked upon these material phenomena of night and tempest as one already above their influences and beyond their power.

"'Tis a great thought that you and I are bigger than this weather. A man's soul can steer through the worst storm ever loosed against earth—steer a straight course and fear no evil of

earth or sea. This dust of us will soon be ice, my lad. We shall sink into this frozen wilderness as rain falls on a river: but we ourselves——"

"Hope on, hope on," gasped the younger man. "We'll fight the British weather as we've fought the British ships. There's a shot in the locker yet!"

They crawled forward, and Stark, himself failing slowly, well knew that the increasing weight upon his arm must soon bring him to earth with his friend. Miller was nearly spent. He began to speak fitfully, but rambled in his speech, and discussed men and matters beyond his companion's knowledge. For ten minutes they pressed on, but advanced little more than two hundred yards in the time. Snow still fell, though less heavily, and it seemed to Stark that the wind abated a trifle, but he could not be sure, for sensation was almost dead. His legs felt nothing, even when he struck them against the stones. They had followed a wide slope of the land, and now stood in the very shadow of death where Childe the Hunter's ruined cenotaph had risen, and where legend pointed to the sportsman's place of passing even on such a night, and in such an hour.

There was a sudden rent in the snow-clouds at this moment, for out of heaven burst a blast so awful that it tore the inky curtains of the storm, swept the air clear along its hurricane ways and brought a fleeting glimmer of light to earth. In the black chasm opened on high reeled suns, and the flames of bygone ages flashed into the eyes of dying men. Then those silvery star-fires were swallowed up again, and the tempest, shrieking like a fury, tumbled its pall over them to lift it no more. Yet in that blast another light than those of the indifferent universe had touched upon Cecil Stark's fainting eyes. Dear as the smile of a friend, as the sound of a voice, as the hand of a man stretched to save, he had marked a ruddy flash from one little window high aloft on the western face of Fox Tor Farm. Like a lighthouse lamp it hung above the chaos. It flashed serene and steadfast; then the blizzard thundered down again, and it vanished behind the snow.

"All's over, old fellow," said Jonathan Miller. "I'm done for—fought and lost, and glad to go. My heart's stopping. Go on—good-bye."

"Look, man, look! Right ahead! Ah! 'tis blotted again; but I saw it clear enough—lifted above us—a light."

"I shall see it too—held out of Heaven to guide us. God is kind. The road's always clear to Him."

"Be of good cheer yet! 'Twas an earthly light I saw—ruddy and heart-warming! Don't—don't—give up the fight when we're so near—one effort more—one——"

For answer the other's hand relaxed, and he fell suddenly face downwards.

Stark instantly bent to raise his friend, but he could not. Himself he dropped to his knees; then, with a great struggle, stood again upon his freezing feet.

"Go, lad—go," said the fallen man. "By stopping you slay us both. Hold on to the light if you can. Speed—speed! Death is alongside now—ready to board——"

Stark knew the truth of this, and, striving in vain to note some mark that should indicate where Miller lay, he turned whence the light had shone.

"Trust me then. I'll get back in time! Don't sleep—keep shouting—keep shouting. We'll save you yet!"

Stark spoke cheerily as though already in the company of other men; but his hope perished as he turned and saw his friend a silent spot in the darkness—already half obliterated by snow. A sob rose in the man's throat, and he felt a tear like a spark of fire upon his cheek.

"The end of him—the cruel, bitter end of a great sailor and a good man. God's curse on those that murdered him!"

The cry came thickly and the shrieking wind carried it away.

Stark staggered against the hill, sometimes upon his feet, sometimes on his knees. The light gleamed fitfully and directed him across the storm. Now it vanished behind curtains of snow; now it broke through once more, placid of flame and mellow of hue. Higher it towered and higher, until it seemed to the wanderer immediately above him. But even as he looked up to it, the sailor fell into a little rivulet and struggled with fresh bruises on to the further bank. A steep slope still subtended the space between himself and the shining window. The light beckoned him forward and forces unseen denied any further advance. He could stand no longer, but grovelled on yard by yard. Then a wall buried in the snow, raised a barrier, mountainous to his feebleness, and he remained motionless beneath it for a full minute. Peace was there and delicious silence. The

snow warmed him ; the coverlet crept up and up. It was pulled over his breast, neck, head, by gentle hands. He remembered his mother and her cradle-songs in his childhood. "'Tis the great Mother tucking me up," he thought. For a moment, as it seemed, the glow of health and vigour drove his blood along. Life was kissing him and saying 'good-bye.' His eyes shut ; all present things began to sink away out of his mind. He smiled indifferently and, turning back along the pathway of consciousness, retraced his life's short road and passed its memories in final review. He remembered the defeat of the *Marblehead* and felt the sharp grief of failure. He saw the 'Stars and Stripes' flutter down, as the dying see their last sun sink ; and that darkest emotion of his days reawakened now, mercifully held force enough to shatter the snow-trance. He opened his eyes, found an impulse of restored energy from his short respite, saw the light clear and sharp above, and surmounted the stone wall, but fell prone upon the other side. Then, with a sort of savage thankfulness that the last stage in the long fight was come, he rolled and crawled thirty yards more and reached within twenty feet of Fox Tor Farm.

Powerless to lift a finger more, he lay there, stared at the light and blinked his eyes to keep the snow out of them, that the image of that shining window might remain clear. Its radiance would brighten his end, and the idea strangely comforted him. His wits reeled again ; he prayed a wild prayer ; he began to long for life with all his might, and the desire towards it poured in a frantic torrent over him. A signal set within his eyes by man smiled upon him, but he could not reach it. Thrice he shouted to Miller to follow him ; to shout for his own salvation did not strike his mind ; and whilst he cried aloud for the third time, the storm, that had increased to sweep the snow clear of one bright window, lulled, and for a moment drew a long, sobbing breath, ere it shrieked again. In that oasis of silence the man poured out his last cry to his friend ; but only the raving voices from above answered it, for Miller had long passed beyond sense.

And yet, behind the granite of the farm were wakeful ears. Aloft Grace Malherb lay sleepless, while she watched a great heap of snow gather upon her bedroom hearth. The taper that was leading Stark to salvation beamed steadfastly to him ; to Grace, under her blankets, it staggered and reeled and guttered, and

fought strange draughts that crept through unknown chinks and crannies. Then, the hour being eleven, there fell that awful simultaneous suspiration of breath in the yelling throats of the storm. A mysterious silence touched the night and in the moment of it a human cry—wild and faint—reached the girl's straining ear. No other heard it, for though Malherb walked below, uneasy before the onset of this hurricane, his dwelling lay between him and the lost man, while for the rest all that household slept in peace.

Now did Death huddle close over Cecil Stark, hide him, muffle his speech, and steal his senses one by one; yet with his last throb of consciousness the sailor shouted on to Miller, and before his voice stilled and his life was in the act to close, Grace Malherb had reached her father where he walked and told her news. He showed much doubt, yet lost not a moment, and the last weak cry of the man in the snow saluted Beer and Malherb as they crept round the southern front of the farm with a lantern.

"Miller! Miller! Mil——!"

Then they heard no more, but guided by the voice, struggled across the snow to it and fell over a fellow-creature.

Battered, bleeding, apparently lifeless, Beer and his master discovered Cecil Stark; and they picked him up and thanked God and carried him into Fox Tor Farm.

CHAPTER XIII

A GRAVE IN THE HEATHIER

FOR two days the great blizzard continued, and Cecil Stark remained more or less unconscious. Sometimes he recovered sufficiently to speak, and his friend's name was upon his tongue when he did so; but the sick man could neither frame a coherent sentence, nor make his desires understood to any listener. At length, however, he began to mend, and Maurice Malherb, who held himself something of a physician, pronounced that the lad was out of danger. For this happy circumstance he took all credit to himself, but Grace declared that she it was who had saved the wanderer's life. As yet she had not seen him. Her mother and Dinah Beer ministered to him during his unconsciousness, obeyed the master in every particular, and, with most assiduous care, steadily nursed Cecil Stark back into life after he had said farewell to it.

The American prisoner's return to intelligent speech brought no small annoyance for his host. Stark's clothes were bought from a Jew pedlar, and had not betrayed him; but he made all clear as soon as he was able to do so; and Mr. Malherb, stamping into the parlour after his first conversation with the invalid, announced a discovery with considerable wrath. As yet no news of the outer world had reached Fox Tor Farm. It lay separated from all things by impenetrable barriers and drifts of snow.

"An American! A wretched prisoner who broke out of Prince Town on the night of the storm. One Cecil Stark, by a vile coincidence. Doubtless that rascal who came so near to braining Grace in the summer. Himself and other blackguards climbed over the walls, for our sentries had been moved and wrapped in cotton wool, I suppose, to keep the weakly fools from freezing!

Once in the teeth of the storm, three of the six prisoners turned tail and went back as fast as their legs would carry them. Three held on. One—a common sailor—was soon lost; two—this lad and another officer—struggled to within a hundred yards of my mansion. Then the elder fell to rise no more, and the boy, with a last effort, reached us. The rest you know. Thanks to Grace and to me, he will regain his worthless life, and not lose a finger."

"But the other poor souls—how monstrous sad to think that one perished almost at our doorstep! I pray you despatch Beer, Woodman, and the rest instantly, dear Maurice," cried Mrs. Malherb.

"Am I a stone?" he answered. "Already the men and dogs are seeking this unfortunate creature. But he is far beyond all help. It may be that we shall not find him before the melting of the snows."

Mr. Malherb hastened off, and Annabel, taking Grace with her, went to see their guest. Young Lee had been appointed night nurse to the sufferer, and now John met Grace and her mother as they arrived.

"Mr. Stark is sitting up," he said. "He finds himself too weak to rise, but he awaits you very eagerly. I hear him mumbling a speech that shall express his deep regret for all the care he has given here."

"He shall say no such things," declared Mrs. Malherb; yet, before she could prevent it, Stark began upon the theme at his heart.

"Forgive me, madam, for this terrible trouble that I have brought into your home. I had better far have died outside it. Yet I bless you that I still live. To sharp ears and generous courage and wonderful skill I owe my salvation, and 'tis beyond human power ever to thank you for such goodness. Samaritans indeed have you been to me. You have given me back my life."

"Then I pray you to set a better value on it, Master Stark," said Annabel, "for truly you rated it but low to venture it on such a hazard."

"It shall be precious henceforth. When I grow desperate I will consider the price of skill and trouble with which you and your husband have redeemed it."

"And my daughter, sir; your best thanks are due to her, for 'twas she who heard your cry in the night."

Grace, gazing down, saw a strong, young face, with wild black hair, a powerful neck, square jaw, and clean, firm mouth. Stark's countenance was very thin, and the grey eyes that burnt out of it appeared dim and weary. Their lids kept falling upon them. But now into his face came a flush. He had not yet looked at Grace Malherb, nor did he do so now.

"God bless your daughter, madam. And have they found him—my friend—the Commodore? 'Twas to him I shouted, and forgot that the cry might reach any other listener."

"I fear you must not hope——"

"No, no. I only trust that he may be found—his dust. Oh, God of Mystery! to think that I led my friend directly to your very gates and lost him then because my senses were sealed up. Mayhap one word had saved him! And such a sailor as any nation might take glory in! He lies there, frozen to death; while I bide here alive, with angels to tend my good-for-nothing body."

"He's gone to greater and better work, young sir," said Annabel.

"There's no greater or better work on earth or in Heaven, madam, than to fight for one's country," he answered wearily.

"And is not Heaven the Country of us all? What nobler task than to fight for that? You shall find there—not Frenchmen, nor Englishmen, nor Americans—but only happy souls at rest."

"Your land has killed a great man," he said.

"Alas, sir! Of what nation on earth can less be confessed? The conqueror's path is often over noble corpses. You are young and our terrible solitudes have not yet tamed you. We shall see you again to-morrow. Meantime John Lee and Mrs. Beer are at your beck and call by night and day. And accept my earnest and prayerful thanksgiving that you are spared to do worthy work in the world."

"And mine too, Mr. Stark," said Grace.

Then, for the first time, he lifted his eyes to her face and recognised her. Thereupon his slight colour faded away, and he seemed like to faint. Instead, he braced himself, sat up, regarded her with deep emotion and spoke.

"I remember you! You have paid me good for evil, indeed. I——"

But here his fortitude failed him, his spirit was shaken in

its present feeble state, and he turned his face away to the wall. Annabel hastened her daughter out of the room and followed her immediately.

"The poor young man is reduced to the utmost weakness," she presently told her husband. "He must have all the strong and sustaining fare that we can bestow upon him to restore his masculine serenity. 'Twas he whose chisel nearly destroyed dear Gracie, and when he saw her and thought upon it, he hid his face to weep. 'Twas a pitiful sight—happily only seen by women."

"Death came so nigh that it robbed him of manhood—if Americans have manhood—yet just missed to grasp at his life. We must restore him to health and to prison as quickly as may be. There is wine in my cellar—an elixir beyond reach of any now, for none remains in the market. He shall be free of it. Yet I hate to think that even in the name of humanity we have suffered an American to cross this threshold."

"Our country's enemy, father, not ours," said Grace.

"And since when were my country's enemies not mine, chit?" he asked.

"Yet you praised Monsieur Marliac, who is on parole at Ashburton, for his riding in that noble run before the ill weather."

"His riding, yes; not him. He happens to be a marvellous fine horseman with British resource and courage. Some Englishman doubtless taught him. Have done with that. When this boy returned to consciousness, my first demand upon him was that he should give me his parole. Needless to say, he instantly agreed to do so."

The baying of a hound, the shrill barking of two terriers, and the murmur of men's voices came through the window. Other sounds there were not, for the snow had long muffled up the earth and made its frozen surface dumb. Glancing out of the casement, Malherb saw the sight that he awaited, bade Grace and her mother retire, then solemnly went forth uncovered to meet the dead.

An hour before, Thomas Putt, with Beer, Harvey Woodman and Mark Bickford, had tramped out of doors to seek the body of Cecil Stark's companion. The snow no longer fell; the sky was clear, yet lacked colour; the wind, sunk from its sustained

fury, now uttered gigantic but irregular sighs and slept between them. When it blew, snow-wreaths puffed aloft in little spirals, and deep white snow-banks slipped and cracked. Like streams of ink the rivers wound beneath, and every rush and briar beside them bent under its proper weight of snow. The glare of the earth upthrown made Mr. Putt's eyes smart. A bitter, steely cold still held the Moor, and every man was wrapped up in such thick garments as he possessed. Mr. Beer wore one of his wife's shawls wrapped round his ears, while each labourer had fashioned himself haybands to protect his legs. They held their task vain, but hoped that the dogs might do what they could not. The hound—a mastiff—rejoicing in its liberation, bellowed and plunged dewlap deep in the snow, while the terriers tumbled and rollicked after it until only their wagging tail-stumps were visible.

Richard Beer growled at the evil times and speculated where the farm field-walls might lie under this universal carpet.

"Us might so soon seek a storm-foundered sheep or steer as a man," declared Putt. "I'll be tissicked up wi' brownkitty again to-night, an' nobody to care a cuss whether my breathing be hard or easy."

"Never seed any man wi' so poor a spirit as you," answered Bickford. "Once you get cold to the bone an' you haven't the pluck of a louse."

"I'm a poor tool when I'm cold, an' I know it," admitted Putt. "Now us be all getting our death for nought. If there was a live party lost 'twould be differ'nt—even though he was an enemy of the nation. But this here chap's been food for foxes these many days."

"'Twas a great sign of the love o' freedom said to be born in 'em, that they Yankees would rather take to the open on such a night than bide any more pent in that den of Frenchmen and prison evil," mused Beer.

"I'm the last to blame 'em," declared Woodman.

"They'm too blown up as a nation, however," added Beer. "'Twas a very unhandsome thing to get in holds with us just when we had our hands full wi' Boney."

"I reckon these chaps had to do what they were told, like us," declared Mark Bickford. "They'm sailor men, so I hear, an' 'tis no use cussing 'em same as master do. They be only earning

their living. A sailor have got to do what he'm bid, like any other warrior."

"God's word! but he makes my blood boil, no matter how cold the weather be—master, I mean. I wouldn't speak to a dog like he speaks to me. The manhood in me will blaze out some day," declared Putt.

"Then you'll get turned off," said Mr. Woodman.

"'Tis very well for you; though Lord He knows how you can stand the mouth-speech you suffer from him in his rash moments," retorted Putt.

"I stand it, like a donkey eats dachells:* I be built to. My family's always had a marvellous power of putting up with hard words from our betters. Not from smaller men, mind you, nor yet from our equals; but what's simple impudence an' sauce not to be borne from the common sort, be just greatness of mind in the bettermost. They don't mean nothing. 'Tis only the haughty blood in 'em."

"'Tis just their haughty blood that these here American chaps won't sit down under no more," declared Mr. Beer. "There's no bettermost among them, so I'm told. A man have got to work his way to the top. He can't be born up top; though how it answers to have no gentlefolks, I ban't witty enough to guess."

Malherb's great mastiff presently, by skill or accident, discovered the thing that these men sought. Beside Childe's desolated cenotaph the hound stopped, lifted up its head and bayed. Then it began to dig, and the terriers, yelping loudly, rushed to aid it. The men with their shovels made quick work, and the corpse of Jonathan Miller lay revealed. Neither physical agony nor mental grief clouded his features. His eyes were shut; his countenance appeared placid under the gentle snow-slumber that had led him through the Valley of the Shadow. All perceived that they stood before one who had been their superior. Thomas Putt touched his hat to the corpse. Beer dragged a bottle from his pocket, then, appreciating the futility of troubling the dead, prepared to put it away again with a sorrowful oath.

But Bickford proposed another course.

"He can't drink, poor hero, but us can. If you've brought brandy, gi' me a drop, for I'm in a proper case for it. My feet be just conkerbils of ice beneath me."

* *Dachells*: Thistles.

Therefore they all drank, and Woodman spoke as his turn came for the bottle.

"Here's to the gen'leman," said he, "an' may he be out of trouble for evermore."

"An' here's to his wife an' family," added Beer, wiping the mouth of the bottle with his sleeve before he put it to his lips. "You may be pretty sartain he's left a wife an' half a dozen, for men in new countries allus get a quiver full, according to the wonnerful wisdom of the Lord."

"An' I'll drink to the sexton," said Bickford, "because the ground's froze two feet, an' the digging of this carpe's grave be going to fetch out a proper sweat on some man."

"You take his honour's heels, will 'e, Woodman? An' walk first. Me an' Putt will hold each a shoulder. You gather up the tools, Bickford, an' keep back they dogs. Look at thicky baggering hound! He knows he've done a clever thing an' wants the world to know it."

So they returned and cast their features into a solemn mould at the direction of Richard Beer.

"Us can't be axed to feel no more than the proper sorrow of man for man," he explained, "but death's death; an' it might be you or me as was going feet first an' shoulder high, but for the goodness of God an' us being Englishmen."

"The poor soul's feet would make a merry-andrew sober," said Woodman. "What he's suffered only him an' his Maker will ever know."

"They'll be cured again afore his honour wants 'em," answered Richard Beer. "He'll rise so well as ever he was at the Trump, along with the best man amongst us."

That night a coffin was built and the dead American's remains laid with reverence therein. A few papers and a watch were found in Miller's pockets, and Malherb, making a packet of them, handed all to the prisoner on parole. Then, two days afterwards, when the weather was bright and the temperature had a little risen, Stark found himself strong enough to rise and creep about and reach the grave that had been dug for his friend.

Maurice Malherb selected a resting-place upon his own domain; and to Bickford himself the task of sinking six feet into the frozen soil was allotted. Thus within the bosom of Dartmoor, as many of his countrymen before him, a good and wise son of

America was laid to rest; but his compatriots' dust mouldered under the prison walls; the sailor slept on the central waste. And still his pall is the solemn-moving and purple shadow of the clouds in summer, and in winter the unstained snow; still his knell is sounded in the musical echo of sheep-bells, or the cry of birds by night. The life and activity of Fox Tor Farm have vanished into the eternal past, and graves widely scattered hold those who buried Miller then; but none sleep so grand, so solitary as he in his forgotten tomb under the heather. A repulsed civilisation has retreated before the severity of the land, before the far-flung granite, hungry peat and rough greeting of winter winds and storms: but these forces, harsh to living man, are the patient watchers beside his grave; this earth and stone he cannot tame, yet they open their hearts to him at the last.

The American was present as chief mourner at his friend's interment; while Maurice Malherb read the funeral service, and at his order all the human life of the farm assembled beside the grave. Stark, now restored to strength, exhibited no trace of emotion during the ceremony, and at the completion of it he limped homeward with Mrs. Malherb and her daughter. This he did by direct command.

"Your health and the weather do not permit me to allow you to follow your wish," his host said curtly; "but I shall be proxy for you in my own person."

Therefore Maurice Malherb waited beside the grave alone until Putt and Bickford had completely filled it up.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OLD AND THE NEW

IN the restless eyes of Cecil Stark there seemed reflected the hunger, ignorance and hope of a new-born nation, together with the spirit of its genius and the solemn magnitude of its destiny. He stood for young America; he typified that majestic land over which the first silver of day had broken, whose transcendent future, sung by the Sons of the Morning, already filled with music a thrilling dawn. Dayspring had touched her eastern shores and now, sweeping over her virgin bosom, warmed the heart that beat there. It advanced with the speed of light, and promised soon to illuminate her spirit, even as the sun himself diurnally swept her being from ocean to ocean; then passed beyond her Golden Gate, that he might dip in the Pacific and behold the horizons of the East.

Against this lad's single heart and sanguine ardour now stood the stern figure of Maurice Malherb; and he was not the best type of Englishman to discuss with youthful America the questions of that hour. Yet the master stood for more than British conservatism and prejudice. He represented glorious traditions and a significant past. Wise and tolerant exposition of their differences had made Stark the man's friend: rational argument and some allowance for the point of view had impressed this young heir of the future and warmed a heart already full of personal gratitude; but Malherb adopted an unwise position. Calm discussion never distinguished his methods; to find in the welfare and advancement of humanity at large a common ground for nations, was no ambition of his. He did not point backward to history and invite Cecil Stark to claim his glorious birthright in the story of the Anglo-Saxon race—a course reasonable enough one hundred years ago, before the American family became

hybrid. He did not indicate his guest's just right, title and share in British story and glory; he did not remind Stark that he was the fellow in blood of Drake and Raleigh, of Shakespeare and Milton; but he denounced all Americans as traitors to their fatherland, spoke of the Revolution, not of the Wars of Independence, and blamed the New World with a rabid bitterness that indicated his class-attitude and justified America more thoroughly than any power of rhetoric or oratory could have done.

Sometimes they agreed to differ, and dropped the subject without heat; more often Malherb broke off with an oath and cursed the weather for still keeping an enemy of England beneath his roof. And yet, despite his flagrant passions and narrow sympathy, he won Cecil Stark, as he won many others, by some magic of character that rose superior to his temper and persistent pride.

Once the American summed the situation in a biting phrase, that stuck with his country's foe long after the speaker had forgotten it. They sat over their wine after dinner, and the lad spoke with pride of the part that a kinsman had played in the capture of the British General Burgoyne.

"Small credit to him," declared Malherb. "Burgoyne? The man was better at making rubbishy pieces for the playhouse than leading an army."

"But those matters that fell out after—they sum the difference—the fundamental differences of ideas between the respective countries, Mr. Malherb," said the sailor. "Simplicity—childish simplicity, if you like—is our keynote, and we shall never depart from it back into old-world pomp. When Burgoyne, clad in a magnificent uniform covered with gold lace, surrendered up his sword, he found the conqueror wearing an old blanket for a cloak and a cotton cap stuck over one ear. There was the type of monarchy triumphed over by a despised but an inspired race. Afterwards Congress, in a sudden fit of reckless generosity, presented General Stark with two ells of blue and one of yellow cloth to make him a conqueror's coat, and six shirts of Dutch linen to wear under it withal! But my father well remembered the general complaining when he received his nation's gift that the cambric for his cuffs was not provided!"

"What argument do you reap from beggarly poverty, sir?"

"Why, sir, who are you to flout it? The beggars won!"

The beggars had the genius on their side. Your country calls for millions on millions to grease the old, creaking wheels of its social and constitutional machinery before they will turn at all; America's unique simplicity only places a single sentinel at the President's door."

"Our failure was an accident of men, not of system," declared Malherb. "Fortune favoured a wicked cause as not seldom happens. You had Washington—a man as great as a fallen angel; we—well, it is idle to name names to-day. But it may be permitted to allude to the Howes, who sacrificed to fraternal affection the vital trust imposed upon them. It is granted that we fought ill and taught you what to avoid: it is even allowed that the scholar became as skilled as the master. Your experience, courage and discipline are British: your treachery and red-skin morality are your own. However, the last word is not yet spoken. There are yet a great many Tories in America."

"Of whom I am one," declared Cecil Stark. "Those who pretend to read the future," he continued, "see two great tendencies amongst us—one towards democracy, t'other towards aristocracy. The nation may become vulgar, or it may become noble; but it *must* become great. None can say more of our future than that by all laws of revealed religion and human history, it should be glorious so long as our aims are pure. To foretell that calls for no prophet."

"What religion sanctions the revolt of a child from its parent? You were not of age. You had no right to think for yourselves."

"The old British fallacy," answered Stark. "Freedom of thought can be denied to none. Deny all other freedom, if you will. But freedom of thought is an immortal fact."

"And duty to your betters is also an immortal fact. Your nation—so to call it—has disgraced itself at the opening of its history. It has begun its separate existence in its father's blood. For what prosperity and blessing shall the country seek that blots the first page of its history with such a crime?"

"A revolt against ignorance, oppression, greed and dishonesty is no crime. Your Parliament had become a hell of narrow-minded, cold-hearted, cynical devils, and to spurn them was a glorious achievement in itself, and the first step upon our path. Slaves do not lift their eyes to the stars and play a worthy part in the history of the world."

"Yet those of us who visited and reported upon you before this war, told no great tale of progress."

"No; they told lies. They were dishonest rascals and did more harm than enough by their falsehoods. You'll regret their deliberate mendacity in the time to come; you'll lament the bitterness of many broad-sheets when the weeds sown in your heads bear fruit in your children's hearts. Pull them out while you can, if you are wise, sir. 'Tis a mad policy to leave them there. Our destiny is sure as the daylight; dark clouds hang over yours. You are old, we are young, yet, when an American is on your lips, your error is that of youth, for you are always hasty and intolerant when you speak of us. It was no unnatural revolt of child against parent, but the noble self-assertion of a growing man, whose liberty, dignity and honour were threatened by a tyrant. We were of your heart's blood; us you might have buckled to you with bonds impossible save between those of one race and one mother. But you spurned us; our welfare was of no account; our power to fill your coffers was everything. You treated us damnably by the hands of base politicians, who lacked common intelligence and foresight. And you have your reward."

"This is the parrot talk of your people, and your trashy scribblers. Public opinion governs America as it must every republic; and what is the public opinion of a nation of rebels worth? You are poisoned by the circumstances of your birth. You have built your stronghold on lawlessness; you spread false reports into your backwoods and mountain fastnesses, your pioneers will never know the thing their leaders did. There is no purity in your public mind; every prejudice against England is fostered until it festers. You are rotten at the roots, and time must prove it."

"I do not think so," answered Stark calmly. "We are a very dispassionate people, Mr. Malherb, and of most unbiassed judgments. We would have listened to Burke; his sublime voice was unheeded amidst the chorus of your ignoble leaders. It pleases you, and those who think as you do, to impute to us a hot-headed and fanatic attitude in our dealings with this nation; but you have driven us into a corner and made us fight for our lives and liberties. Were we to be to England what our black people are to us? God forbid! We are unprejudiced. Prejudice

is a wasting disease of old countries; you shall not find it among the infantile ailments of a young state."

"And will you crow as loudly of the justice of this present shameful war, Mr. Stark? Will you dare hold America innocent of a sinister object at this moment? This quarrel scraped on false pretences, while we have France upon our hands—what casuistry can justify that?"

"I deem it unfortunate, not unnatural. You have taught us to hate you, not to love you. There's no hatred worse than that of kin."

"Or of madmen, for what in sober sanity they should most love and cherish. You're a mad people, and America at this day is sunk to be the sink and lunatic asylum of the earth."

Stark flushed, then sighed.

"I hope you'll live to mourn the folly of such an utterance, dear sir. And for your estimate of us take mine of you: Great Britain is becoming America's volume of reference—no more: and soon enough at the gait she is ganging, she will be altogether behind the van of progress."

"Not yet. We're writing history somewhat quickly. You at Prince Town should know that!"

"The war's not over."

"Why, I think it is—all but the terms of peace. I wish I had the making of 'em."

"Our turn will come. No country can conquer Time. A wise man has said that nations crumble by the process of their own up-massing, like sand in an hour-glass. The fall of every great power is a natural corollary of its rise—as death must follow life. It is not of vital importance to America whether England does her justice now; but it is of vital and eternal importance to England whether she does. We are separated, but the gulf in space matters nothing; it is the gulf in thought that counts. There will come a day when your country will curse those who might have bridged that gulf and helped united England and America to rule the round world. Now it is too late—successive generations will drift further apart, until the bonds that unite us are base and of utility alone. And God, Who judges Nations, as He judges souls, will know how to measure blame when the day of reckoning comes and the awful charge of setting back the world's welfare is read at Doom."

It was this boyish utterance that made Malherb reflect and shadowed his dogmatic certainties. But for a moment only was he silent. Then he rated Stark's ardour and mourned his hopeless ignorance.

They drank their wine and joined the ladies. Before Mrs. Malherb and Grace, politics were not spoken, and intercourse between Stark, his hostess and her daughter was of the friendliest description. The women dispelled his mournful horror of life, brightened existence, and made it a good, desirable, hopeful thing again. They much softened the bitterness of his outlook and appealed to the generosity and gentleness of his nature. To them he spoke of his circumstances, since they showed a lively and ingenuous interest concerning them. He told how that he was an orphan, that he had an uncle of great wealth and importance in his native state of Vermont, and that he was heir to Allen Stark's lands and moneys. He described his youth beside Lake Champlain; he explained his pleasures and ambitions, the customs of his country and the social life of his order.

Cecil Stark's home interested Grace; the people in it attracted her mother. He told them of the Green Mountains and declared that his native land had something in common with their own wild Dartmoor.

"Our great hills gather the water in their moss beds even as do yours," he said. "Problems like these of the Moor on a larger scale occupy the Vermont settlers. The intervalles are a boon to us—low, fertile lands about the rivers. Great floods overrun them in spring and make them rich. But there is a wide difference in other ways. We fight with forests, you with naked wastes. We fell trees that the earth may receive the sun again and grow warm and sweet: you plant them to shelter your lands and homesteads. We hope in time to better our climate, make it more equal and moderate and lessen the awful snows of winter."

"Then your hills are clothed, not naked as ours?" inquired Mrs. Malherb.

"The Green Mountains are covered with aged forests of dwarf evergreens; pine, spruce and hemlock, that spring above stone and moss and winter grass," replied the sailor. "They rise green into the blue sky; their great gorges and valleys are full of blue, mysterious shadows; falling waters glimmer upon their sides and make music there in summer and thunder in winter time."

"We have our Wistman's Wood," said Grace; "but no forests now; and no lakes such as the glorious sheets of water that you tell us of."

"The rivers leap down to them. My earliest childhood's memory is a little boat on Champlain. Even then my small soul longed for the greater sea. Other children would not believe in it. I always did."

Stark told Grace of the natural things her soul loved.

"The brown beaver of North Vermont is a wonder of wonders," he declared. "'Tis the most social of living things. It regulates and governs its ideal republic in a manner so marvellous, that I think a beaver had been the best image for our banner and emblem of our hopes. A pure and perfect constitution obtains amongst 'em. Such harmony men will never know, but must always covet."

He told of their dams and lodges, their arts of safety, their home life. He added many startling facts believed a hundred years ago concerning the beaver, but discredited to-day.

Malherb shook his head.

"You are too eager to flaunt the superiority of even your brute beasts," he said. "You will praise the Red Indians next."

"They have their virtues, sir. Perhaps the man of America has learned from them something of that passionate love of freedom that inspires him. At least Vermont's history is glorious in that respect. We played a notable part before an evasive and temporising Congress. We preserved our independence. We declined to sacrifice our rights, either to the intrigues of our neighbours, or the threats of our supreme tribunal. We challenged the impartial world in 1779, and refused once and for all to submit our sacred liberties to the arbitrament of man. Vermont existed independently of the thirteen United States, and was not accountable to them for the Creator's gift of freedom. We spent our best blood and treasure fighting for it. Were we to give up all at our neighbour's bidding? Were we to hold a great frontier for the States and be rewarded with slavery? We had rather have cast in our lot with Canada—we had even rather have made terms with England than bend under the yoke of New York."

"A lifelong misfortune for you that you did not," answered the farmer.

"No, no. The sequel justified all. To turn to England to settle the rights of man in the Colonies would have been an insane act in those days. Your Government was not then competent to approach such a question as the rights of man."

"No politics, gentlemen," said Annabel; whereupon Cecil Stark begged for pardon, and with sufficient tact turned to matters of more personal interest. He told of sheep and the success attending their breeding in Vermont.

"A wether of three years will weigh one hundred and twenty pounds with us, and yield you three or four pounds of wool," he said. Then he discussed flax—a crop at that time grown also upon Dartmoor—and he fascinated Grace with a description of the maple sugar manufacture, of the precious juice flowing from ancient trees, and of the gorgeous pageant of the maples when Autumn's breath touched their foliage and lighted their aboriginal forests with scarlet and purple and flaming gold.

At other times the lad awakened sorrow in sympathetic hearts by his descriptions of the War Prison and the pitiful life there. But he did not guess the secret pain he thus occasioned; he did not know that Annabel Malherb often sighed when she looked into the winter Moor. Soon a journey to Prince Town would be again possible, and Maurice Malherb much desired it. Neither did the American imagine that Grace suffered dire unrest at this period; nor dream that her maiden happiness slowly foundered in a sea of new sensations, mostly miserable. Yet such was the simple case. Sometimes she shook herself out of these amazing and unprecedented trances with a blushing face and beating heart. Then to the night she would cry softly, "I love John Lee—I love dear John!" But why the fact needed this nocturnal declaration oft repeated, and what antithesis of ideas called it forth under the darkness, Grace Malherb as yet imperfectly perceived.

CHAPTER XV

STARK RIDES AWAY

WITHIN the space of ten short days Cecil Stark was turned from supreme indifference concerning life or death to the contrary emotion. Existence for him had become endowed with a lively charm, and if Grace Malherb's heart fluttered in secret, the sailor's also now beat less steadily, and played him pranks at her approach. He found in the maiden all that love asks, and more by much than ever he had seen in any other woman. Here did beauty, spirit, force of soul, music of voice and graciousness of mien all merge in one lovely girl; and Stark very rightly and properly went down like a man before the irresistible. Now greedily he counted the hours and prayed that the snow might endure. He hated the red sun that daily crept above Cater's Beam and sank where Prince Town lay, for it touched the drifts and changed their character. The expanses of white glittered and settled down, while from their bowels snow-water eternally trickled until the rivers roared, and black, boiling streams, all splashed with yellow spume, thundered from each great hill. Now sunlit streaks and spots of stone, heath and bog broke the huge whiteness of the mountains, and Stark's glimpse of Paradise was nearly over. Each morning at the breakfast-hour he waited in fear for Maurice Malherb to pronounce sentence of departure: each day he breathed again to find a few hours were still left to him.

Grace Malherb proved such a listener as sailors love. She had not imbibed many of her father's prejudices, and was too full of the delight of life on one side, its personal problems and puzzles on the other, to concern herself with politics or abstract ideas touching the welfare of nations. Cecil Stark did what Grace's father was powerless to do, and wakened in her an active interest concerning war. She listened attentively while he rose to the occasion and, inspired by her advertance, painted with all an

earnest lad's enthusiasm the cause for which he fought. She watched from under lowered lids, and while he fancied that her heart must throb to the cannon's roar or the crash of falling spars, she was either comparing his powerful face with the more delicate and more classic features of her lover, or contrasting the fire of the fighting man with the dreamy disposition of John Lee. But John Lee would presently be a fighting man also.

Little basenesses crept into the soul of poor Grace under this ordeal. By night she wept bitterly at herself and marvelled to behold her own meanness. She found herself secretly thankful that Cecil Stark knew nothing of her engagement; then, heartily ashamed, she probed this instinct, and imagined that it must be caused by the American's superiority of position and of rank. In reality she erred and the truth was far different; but this the girl had not as yet discovered. Her misery was extreme, and she blamed herself bitterly when she reflected how much of her thoughts the American prisoner already owned. Indeed, all other concerns swept headlong into a remote, unimportant past. And it was so with the man; for his first love now lighted life with wild, unrestful glory. Of the maiden's heart, indeed, he knew nothing, but, impelled to do so by a vague hope as to the future, he had made a clean breast of his own affairs and dwelt egotistically upon them. Not seldom Mr. Peter Norcot's former assertion clouded those moments in which Stark had sense to pause and reflect, yet the other's name was never mentioned by Grace, and he began presently to hope that the wish was father to Peter's thought and declaration. There seemed no evidence that Miss Malherb's future was already determined.

The sailor's ambitions Grace admired with enthusiasm; his splendid future, his prospective flocks and herds, lands and homesteads beside the Champlain, attracted her less keenly. But more topics than one made the girl's eyes sparkle as he spoke of them.

"You are such a Diana that you'd love Vermont," Cecil once said. "Our folks, however, hunt for business rather than sport. We had moose, deer, bears, foxes and wolves once, and peltry was the great business of the trappers and pioneers. Even yet our furs fetch near two thousand pounds every year; but the beasts are being killed faster than Nature can restore them. They will soon vanish."

"We had wolves here, too. I think the last was killed in Tudor times. 'Twas an obligation under the old local laws that the folk should slay them. Now we have little but foxes; and a good, red Moor fox is the best in England."

"I never hunted, though I can ride sailor-fashion. Now I should like to see you in the saddle, Mistress Grace!"

"Of course you hunt in the English way, if you have respectable hound-fearing foxes?" she asked, ignoring his desire concerning herself.

"Yes; many amongst us stick stoutly to New England ways, which, indeed, are the same as old England ways for that matter. But in states of society such as ours, the conditions make for change. We are deeply interested in education and enterprise; we marry early; we advocate equality of rights, because that is natural where all men have the same interests. But equality of power we never pretend to. The idea is nonsensical; Nature herself shows that. Men are unequal in power and capacity—so are all other animals. We are, I think, both economical and hospitable. We resent control of religion, and hold liberty of thought in that matter vital. We have an elastic mind in affairs of government, and don't attempt to bind posterity to our forms in your English fashion. In England men are full of opinions and empty of information. We let opinions go hang and never tire of learning. We keep fluid; we respect human life very much. Instead of a hundred and sixty capital crimes, as there are in Great Britain, we have but nine sins in Vermont for which a man is punished by death. We marry early——"

"You said that before."

"Did I? Well—it's interesting."

"So it is."

"But I bore you to distraction—I am sure that I must do so, Miss Malherb."

"Very far from it, Mr. Stark. You interest one and all of us. It is marvellous to me how you tell each amongst us the sort of things most likely to attract him, or her. You have made every man your friend; and every woman too."

She dimly guessed his meaning when he dwelt so much upon himself, and told of his honoured family, and of his future as the survivor of the race.

Throughout the severe weather it was impossible for John Lee

to see more than a passing glimpse of his lady. The hardship of this specially touched Grace's heart, and not seldom, after intimate chatter with the American, she purposely sought to console John that she might cheer his loneliness and longing. But in the vital matter of the guest, young Lee suffered less than would have been supposed. Jealousy was no part of his nature. He rejoiced heartily that Grace should have company so interesting during the tedious days after the storm. In common with Beer, Woodman and the rest, John appreciated Cecil Stark, and found his own sentiments echo the sailor's on many subjects. The labourers often discussed their visitor, admired the frank, friendly spirit in which he came amongst them at their work, and regretted the fact that he must soon return to prison.

Once in a morning hour Grace played her piano to the guest, and upon opening a music-book, the ghost of a sprig of white heather, now turned brown, tumbled out of it. Mr. Peter Norcot had presented this trophy, and placed it to mark a song of Herrick's, with Purcell's accompaniment.

Now Stark noted the flower.

"You like it not, I see," he said, for memory suddenly clouded the singer's eyes.

"Dead heath," she answered; "and for me I vow that it never lived. A gentleman placed it there because the song pleased him."

"I'd give the world to know who 'twas, Miss Malherb."

"You shall hear for nothing. There is no secret. The name will not be new to you, I think; Mr. Peter Norcot."

Stark's face fell, and the recollection of many things crowded down bleakly upon him.

"He's a good man—a great-hearted, generous spirit," he declared.

Grace did not answer.

"I have been blind lately," he continued. "My wits went wandering in the blizzard and have never returned. It has pleased me to forget Mr. Norcot too long. What might have been, Miss Malherb! He won parole for us out of his own pure goodness and love of humanity. But meantime we had tried to escape and failed. A mad world! And but for that Jonathan Miller might still be living. The man's name must be blessed by every American that hears it—Norcot's, I mean."

Still Grace made no reply.

"Such a gentleman must be above possibility of error in such a vital thing as he confided to me," pursued Cecil gloomily. "I ought to have faced the fact sooner and not let my fool thoughts—— So you are going to marry him, Miss Malherb?"

"Never, Mr. Stark."

"He told me so—truly he believed it."

"He is wrong. He is a most worthy person, and he very seldom makes a mistake. But he is wrong for once when he says that, or thinks it—wildly, utterly, hopelessly wrong."

"You do not love him?"

"My father does. He desires that I should wed him."

"But surely——?"

"Surely I could do no better,' you were going to say?"

"Indeed, no. Surely your father's first thought is your future happiness?"

"My future—not my future happiness. You see, one's parents have got over our young delusions about people being happy. Fathers and mothers forget that love matters. They hold it as we hold the fleeting wretchedness of a toothache. They don't even pity us. Yet my father was a grand lover, for my mother has told me so; but he has forgotten."

"You honour me to divulge these sacred things about yourself. Poor Norcot—and yet—in a sense—in truth from my whole heart and soul, I mean. But how is this to the point? To sum up, you don't love him?"

"That is exactly what I strive day and night to make clear to everybody."

"Would it be beyond the limits of courtesy to breathe a question on so great a subject? Yet I seem to know the answer. It must be so. It sinks like lead into me; you love somebody else, Miss Malherb?"

"Heyday! And if I do, why should you be miserable, Mr. Stark? I love my mother, sir, and my father, and—and all who love me—excepting only Mr. Norcot. I love him too—the Bible bids me love him; but I don't like him. The Bible is too wise to order the impossible. It does not tell us to like anybody."

"Listen, if I may—at least——"

"Do you hear the river in flood? It is like the sound of an angry sea by night."

"I hear it well enough. The snows are melting, and my happiness with them. Oh, if I dared—before I left you! If I had a pinch of my country's courage!"

"You do not lack for that, else you would never have seen Dartmoor."

"That was the chance of defeat. But real bravery—There's such a madness here raging in me—such a hurricane that——"

"Oh, darrie me! Even such nonsense does Mr. Peter Norcot talk!"

"And so you answer him. Yet your eyes are gentler than your tongue. I'll speak—I care not. I'm only a sailor swept here by chance. Fate—at least Providence, I mean—to be plain, I love you! I love you so dearly that I'd—but not until I'm no longer a prisoner. After the war—could you listen then? I—oh, my heart and my life, say I may come back again after the war!"

The lightning progress of this business burnt poor Grace like fire. She gasped as he spoke. Her senses reeled. She had not strength to draw from him the hand that he had clasped and now passionately kissed. He was down upon his knees beside her, and she saw his great chest rise and fall, she felt his eyes pierce to her heart and read the truth there. Now she understood her mistake. This was love, and all the past only a ghostly phantom and mockery of it. She longed to give herself up to him. She felt that he offered her life, that his voice woke the soul that had slept until now within her. Then she blushed at the baseness of her thoughts and spoke with levity to hide the first mighty joy and the first master-sorrow that her heart had ached over.

"Come back if it pleases you, Mr. Stark. But not to me. Worthless thing that I am, another already claims my love."

He released her hand reverently, then rose.

"'Twas an insult to you not to know that without being told. I did right to say that I was mad."

"You'll never speak of this," she whispered; "your own act forced it from me. I am proud to think that you could love me; but you will keep my secret?"

"Trust me for that. As you'll keep my confession, so I shall cherish yours. God knows how I can go on living any more. Yet I'll even curse the end of the war that sets me free now, for free in truth I'll never be again."

"Then I shall feel sad to think I have a slave against my will. I shall suffer to remember that."

"Remember me no more at all. Only remember that you have lifted me up and made my existence good and precious. You saved my life and led me into a paradise. Now I must depart again. Twice conquered by England am I; and blessed in being conquered."

"You are generous and I do greatly esteem you, sir," faltered Grace. "You have brought happiness and interest and knowledge into my ignorant days. More knowledge than you think for! I thank you for all your goodness, and I mourn to know you are so ill-paid. Had it not been—at least—I shall never forget you."

"May God bless and keep you and the man you love," he said earnestly. "You have been light in darkness to me; I shall always love and worship you. And he who has won you has my admiration and respect for ever. A king of men must he be!"

Annabel Malherb entered at this moment, and she came the bearer of stern news for Stark. Yesterday her intelligence had sunk him into the depths of tribulation; to-day he welcomed it. Henceforth his prison was not of stone and iron, but built in memory. To breathe the same air with Grace Malherb would be his sole remaining privilege now, since closer common interest he could never claim.

Maurice Malherb sent a courteous inquiry as to whether his guest's convenience would be suited by early departure on the following morning.

"If so," said Annabel, "my husband proposes that you and he should ride together after breakfast to—to Prince Town, dear Mr. Stark."

The sailor declared that he was ready.

"And to thank you, madam, would be a vain, impossible task," he said. "Your daughter saved my life; you and your husband nursed me back to health, bore with me in my weakness and ill humours, sympathised with my sorrows, treated me with a consideration and kindness beyond belief. I shall never while I live forget your goodness, nor forget to be grateful for it."

Upon the following morning Cecil Stark departed, and it was a secret joy to Grace amid all her secret grief, that he rode upon 'Cæsar.' She steeled herself to the farewell, for now she knew, indeed, that she loved him; now she found her desire towards

him a live, gigantic and ponderable passion, not the gauzy and delicate understanding that she had maintained with John Lee. Love took her by the heart-strings, shook her, banished sleep, killed appetite, wrote care within her young eyes and revealed it upon her looking-glass at dawn. Her future life, from a vague shadow, half shunned, half spied upon, as in the past, now came close and stared at her. She found the time to come hideous and wished that she might die to escape from it. She looked ill when she bade the American prisoner "good-bye"; and he observed it and felt it hard to keep his voice steady.

Then Grace watched him ride away with her father, and behind them trotted John Lee. He passed where she stood at a wall on the farm boundaries and touched his hat to her, for he could be seen by all. But only Grace was within reach of his voice.

"At last, my darling dear! At last I shall kiss your sweet lips again! Such news—such brave news, my Gracie! I've found the hiding-place of the amphora!"

He passed on, and the girl, returning to her chamber, locked the door of it and wept as she had not wept since childhood.

"Three—three men," she sobbed to herself. "Three grown men can all love this wretched thing. And I hate one; and I—I—love one: and good John Lee, handsome, humble, kind, faithful John Lee; I would rather die a thousand deaths than break my troth to you!"

CHAPTER XVI

GOOD NEWS

IN his own estimation Maurice Malherb had long since mastered the mysteries of Dartmoor, and was now familiar with its difficulties and dangers by night or day. But heavy snow presented new problems; progress toward Prince Town proved very difficult; many detours had to be made, and a chill gloaming, lighted by the purity of the snow, already sank upon the travellers before Siward's Cross was reached.

As they approached Lovey's cottage, Malherb called up his groom and bade him ride ahead. Until the present John had kept behind, for his master objected to take advice or profit by the lad's local experience.

"Get you forward to your grandmother and order a brew of hot drink, John Lee. A draught of milk with something from my spirit-flask will not be amiss."

John cantered forward and Stark, as many a man had done before him, admired the rider's perfect skill.

"How magnificently that fellow sits his horse," he said.

"Well enough; but it was not I who taught him—a natural gift," confessed Mr. Malherb.

When they reached Mrs. Lee's hut, both dismounted and entered the squalid den, to find a pan of milk already steaming upon a great peat fire. Malherb showed by no word or sign the nature of his last meeting with Lovey Lee, and the American was similarly cautious. As for the miser, she treated them both with equal indifference.

Cecil Stark gazed round him to see the salvation he had fought to find in the storm. With better knowledge of the Moor, his amazement grew at his own recent escape: and yet a thing not less remarkable had fallen out on the same tremendous night.

When Lovey Lee handed a cup to the prisoner, Malherb proposed to add spirits from his flask, but the old woman objected.

"Put nothing in, young sir. There's a drop of cordial there already. Think you I don't know what cold men need to warm their vitals?"

Stark laughed but read the look in her eyes and took the cup quickly. Then he saw that a hollow hazel-nut floated in the milk and, familiar with Lovey's expedients, drank at once. The nut he kept within his cheek and presently transferred to his pocket.

Anon they went their way refreshed, and, commenting upon the grim and starved object who had ministered to them, Stark listened to new sentiments from Maurice Malherb, and saw a little deeper into the gulf that separated their convictions.

"The peasant's mind has ever been my close study, and I have endeavoured to supply his requirements all my life," declared the older man. "His path is narrow, but well marked. To attempt to draw him from it would be madness. Poverty is no hardship in itself, and to teach a peasant to be other than poor is no part of a wise man's work."

"But education——"

"Endangers the tranquillity of the community at large. It unsettles their minds, loosens the bonds that holds them to their native soil, provokes all manner of outrage. Think of the Tories, the Peep-o'-Day Boys, the Hearts of Steel and other ruffianly hordes of banditti that disturbed Ireland before the rebellion."

"But education is the watchword of civilisation," exclaimed Stark.

"You think so; but like every half-truth, the idea is abominably dangerous. What do you do? Under the name of Liberty, you invite to your naked shores the German, the Frenchman, or any other needy and worthless adventurer who goes a-wandering. You announce that the feudal services required by the great from the humble in Europe are banished from your country. You tell the new-come immigrants that lie—you, who keep your heel upon the black and fill your pockets with the proceeds of his misery! A race of slave-dealers to trumpet Liberty!"

Stark flushed and felt the hit.

"I grant some truth there. Please God, we'll live to see that

plague-spot healed. But our constitution is sound: we shall throw our ailments off. To deny knowledge to your own people—that is a worse disease. Consider the epidemic you will breed!”

“You are ignorant of history, Mr. Cecil Stark. We have centuries of experience on which to base our judgment. What think you fostered the naval rebellion of fifteen years ago? As a sailor that will interest you. Why, the pen-and-ink gentry aboard His Majesty’s ships of war! They made a mutiny with their devilish doctrines scratched on paper and spread in secret from vessel to vessel. How shall we suppress concerted action in the multitude, if every Jack among ’em learns to read and write? Consider the sedition that must spring from such an abandoned state. No, let the poor work, not think. These people are only too ready to believe that their penury is the result of our oppression, and grows incompatible with the rights of man. Then what follows?”

“They’ll do as we did and cast off their chains for ever,” declared the sailor.

“You would support anarchy then?”

“And yet you yourself, sir, give your own workers more than the usual wage, and pay the women as women were never paid elsewhere—so Kekewich informed me.”

Malherb shook his head impatiently.

“They will be talking, damn them, instead of doing their work. Don’t argue from a particular case. I’ve my own private opinion—especially as to women’s labour on the land. That’s neither here nor there. I’m possibly wrong. Education takes the poor to the devil. Enlarge their views and you distort their views. They institute uncomfortable and improper comparisons; they begin to confuse the rights of property; the sanctity of birth is forgotten; the interests of the country are threatened: the State totters and falls.”

“Surely the sooner it falls, the better for England. A State built on foundations of ignorance——”

“So you echo your specious people. Ignorance is the solid and everlasting rock on which the prosperity of every State must exist. If you believe your Bible, you will see from Genesis that the Creator made happiness depend on ignorance. The Tree of

Knowledge is a very statesmanlike conceit. Preserve a fundamental ignorance at any cost. Your own life depends upon it. Once let knowledge in—'tis like the foul air in a mine—death follows. The Church battens on that golden rule; so does the State. The security of both lie therein. But our spiritual and temporal lords are far too wise openly to proclaim what I tell you."

"Then God help your country," answered the younger man; "for a policy more cynical, more vile, was never uttered. I go to prison now, but 'tis you who are in prison. I am free. This State's a prison—a prison not made with hands, but with heads—a prison of cruel prejudices, narrow distinctions, distrusts, hatreds, and lies. But your prosperous errors shall not always prevail against unpopular truths. Your time will come."

"I wish you had been better brought up," said Malherb. "You feel deeply; there is character in you; but unfortunately it has been poisoned at the source."

"And I wish that I could open your prison doors, sir, before mine shut upon me. Stone and iron are only dust; they will not endure; but the pride of Lucifer, the blind prejudice of the Dark Ages, and such a damnable policy as you have this moment uttered, make a prison-house for the spirit of man that it will need a revolution to shatter."

"It is such windy nonsense that has led you there!" answered Malherb.

He pointed where the grey walls of Prince Town, set in snow, rose ashy against the twilight, and Stark's enthusiasm chilled a little at sight of them.

They fell into silence; then the American shook his host's hand and bade him a grateful farewell. A moment later he had dismounted from 'Cæsar' and entered the War Prison.

Two surprises awaited the sailor. Within Lovey's hazel-nut was a scrap of paper that told how, by miraculous chance, James Knapps had escaped the blizzard, and, while turning from the full force of it, in reality corrected his way and made a straight journey to the hut by Siward's Cross. Thus wonderfully he saved his life: and his eyes, at a crack in the boards of Lovey's ceiling, had watched Cecil Stark beneath. Through Lovey, Knapps now made urgent appeal to his friends, and the paper

in the nutshell called for money to pay the miser and for instructions as to the future conduct of Mr. Knapps himself.

Heartened by this circumstance, Cecil Stark presently went before the authorities ; and then another sensation greeted him. During his absence Captain Cottrell had been superseded, and a new commandant now reigned over the prisoners.

d for in-
elf.
tly went
ted him.
ed, and a

BOOK III
UNDER THE EARTH

CHAPTER I

THE TREASURE HOUSE

ON a day when the storm had sunk to a grim memory, when cold winds blustered and more snow fell through the dark and sunless weeks before spring-time, did Harvey Woodman and Richard Beer hold converse with ancient Kekewich. For once the pessimist had those of the household with him: but no sooner were the labouring men reduced to a condition of absolute hopelessness before the picture he painted, when Kekewich changed sides, according to his wont, took up his master's part and foretold fair things out of contradiction.

"Ban't our business," declared Woodman, "an' yet even a common man have eyes; an' touching the potatoes, a fool could see he's wrong."

"Actually feeding the stock on 'em, an' grumbling when my wife goes to fill a sack for the house!" said Beer. "Ban't good husbandry or good sense to feed beastes on such human food. Lord knows they potatoes cost enough to fetch up out o' the airth. 'Twould be better far to face the trouble an' buy fodder in a big spirit."

"No method to him, if a man may say so without disrespect," answered Woodman. "Of course you wants to look forward more 'pon Dartymoor."

"He fights the Moor same as he fights life," explained Kekewich. "The masterfulness of un be so tremendous that us might almost look to see Nature go down afore him."

"Nature don't go down; 'tis us that do," replied Beer: "an' if the storm haven't taught him that, nothing won't. 'Tis no sense your telling that sort o' rummage, Kek, an' very well you know it."

"Not but the gentleman have his black moments," continued Woodman. "I've seed him pass by me many a time wi' a cloud

on's face, an' a puzzled look in his eyes, as if he was trying to read in a book an' couldn't catch the meaning. Yesterday he stood in the opeway an' stared out afore him so grim as a ghost, as if he might have been waiting a message from the sky."

"He'll get a message as he won't like the taste of afore long," foretold Beer.

"He don't go about the right way to larn, I'm sure—to say it without offence," added Woodman.

"He won't larn nought from you dumpheads, that's sartain," said Kekewich. "But he'm far off a fool, an' his heart's got eyes if his head haven't. When all's said, 'tis for his lady an' his darter he thinks an' plans. He lies waiting o' nights for the honour an' glory of the family. Things will fall out right yet, an' us shall live to see it."

"'Tis very well, though you'm the first to holler 'ruin' yourself most days," retorted Beer, rather indignant that Kekewich should thus take up a position so unusual. "Us all knows the man do mean well as an angel, yet it looks a very unhandsome thing to thrust his maiden into matrimony with a chap she hates like sin."

"So it do," assented Woodman. "You'm right, Richard. I'll take his stand behind his darter's welfare an' put a husband she hates upon her. Wise it may be; Christian it ban't. But every-thing's cut and dried now, and Mordecai Cockey, the journeyman tailor, be coming in six weeks to make the clothes, so my wife tells me."

"The maiden's Malherb, faither or no faither," said Beer, "an' Dinah, as understands such affairs, have marked by many a fore-token that she won't wed out of her heart—not for fifty faithers."

"Matters be coming to a climax then," declared Harvey Woodman solemnly. "My wife dreamed o' blood t'other night; an' for my part I've seen Childe's tomb in my dreams, wi' Childe hisself rising up like a ragged foreign bear. I do hate for things to come in a heap this way. Ban't natural we should be called upon to suffer more ills than one to a time. There's the whole Book of Lamentations bearing down on Fox Tor Farm in my opinion, an' I'd so soon be away as not."

"He've got money, however," argued Beer. "Money will stem a good few mortal ills, let them as haven't got none say what they please."

"As to that, my Mary heard him tell Missis something about a canal somewheres that's gone scat; an' the lady turned white as curds an' went in her chamber for to get over it unseen," answered Woodman. "If you ax me, I reckon he'm driven for money. When I spoke to un of half a dozen more drashels,* as wouldn't have cost half-a-crown, he got so touchy as proud-flesh, an' told me to run out of his sight, an' said us was a lot o' lazy good-for-nothing hirelings as never thought of his pocket. Of course he was round next day as usual with a cheerful word an' the money; but I tented un to the quick when I axed for it first."

"An' that's why Miss Grace have got to marry Mr. Norecot, no doubt," declared Beer. "'Tis so much for her father's good as her own belike."

He nodded to where Grace rode past the barn. She was clad in a snug, short habit of purple Totnes serge; and upon her hands were a pair of gloves made from the skin of a wild cat that had been captured after prodigious exertions by Thomas Putt. Behind Grace rode John Lee, and their enterprise was secret, for it had to do with the young man's recent great discovery. Now Grace, despite the languor of these days and the anti-climax that followed upon Cecil Stark's departure, found herself awake and much alive. Darkness shadowed her life and her home. She knew that trouble slept with her parents and haunted her father in all his goings; she suffered for them; yet she believed that no such sorrow as her own private sorrow had ever crushed into a human life before; that no such tragic experience as this mistake of emotion for passion, had until now tortured an unhappy young heart. Yet to fight upon her father's side seemed good. She desired dangers and difficulties to lift her from her personal tribulations. She herself had planned the present expedition, and Lee was in some concern, for though undertaken by daylight, it lacked not danger. John had at last discovered Lovey's hiding-place, and now he was taking his mistress to see it.

"Your star-bright eyes will find this wondrous treasure if 'tis there," he said. "For myself I could light on nothing but money-bags. They had gold in 'em and were ranged on stone ledges as high as I could reach. For the rest, there was a pitcher

* *Drashels*: Flails.

under trickling water that runs in a corner of the place : a basin, with mouldy bread and cheese in it : and a great stone upon which stood half a dozen rush-lights. And as I first climbed down, 'twas like the story of Arabia that you told me, for the walls of the hole all shone as though they were plastered with pure gold. A light in darkness they made. 'Tis a shining moss that glitters there on the damp rocks. I'm right glad to have found the place ; an' yet my mind misgives me that more evil than good will come out of it."

"The only evil that can come out is Lovey Lee. If she caught us!"

"No—that won't happen. She's safe for to-day. You'll laugh, but you know there's force in the old charms for all your laughing. They work, though wiseacres may know better."

"John, John!"

"A maiden nail has power, I tell you, despite all scoffing."

"A maiden nail ! And what is that?"

"A nail fresh made from bar iron—one that has never touched ground. Drive such in the threshold of a witch's door and for a day and night she cannot hurt a fly."

"Really, John Lee, I could blush for you—here at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in these dazzling days of enlightenment!"

"I got 'em from Noah Newcombe, hot off his anvil," said John, "and I've driven them home into the dern of grandmother's door. Believe it or not, I very well know she's harmless to all mankind this day."

"I wish I had such faith in men as you have in nails, John," said the girl thoughtfully. Then silence fell between them, and Grace reflected upon her sweetheart's credulity. She had never realised the extent of it until recent events and the intercourse with the American prisoner. Peter Norcot's manifold ingenuities and petty cleverness of quips and cranks had but served to make John Lee's simplicity shine bright by contrast ; but the light that Stark cast over thought was a white light, and smote pitiless upon both the others.

"You have faith in one man sure?" said John presently. He had thought of her words long before replying to them.

"In two—in two," she answered hastily : but more she would not say.

"'Tis old Kekewich and me," he mused aloud. "A very strange thing, my lady dear, that two such men should get to be trusted by your sweet spirit, afore all the rest of the world."

But she could not let him remain in ignorance.

"I meant Mr. Stark, not Kek," she answered.

He nodded and looked away.

"I know you meant him. 'Twas only to see if you'd tell me, that I pretended you meant Kek. A sly thing to do, but somehow I was tempted."

She did not answer, nor did he speak again until they reached the ruin in Hangman's Hollow.

"Here we are at last—a queer sort of place. 'Twould call for little fancy to see my grandmother meeting the Devil himself here after dark. 'Pon that rowan above the gravel-pit a man hanged himself a little while back, 'cause he found he'd been cheated over a horse. Here, under our feet, is granny's den. We'll dismount, tether up; an' then you follow me down this blind alley-way to the top of the mound. By the wall-side at the end, is a stone that will turn when we set foot upon it, and open a hole down the blowing-house chimney into a great chamber underground."

Grace dismounted; John fastened up their horses and soon led the way whither Lovey Lee had vanished.

"But 'twas no miracle after all, you see. There—the stone twists on a regular pivot. 'Tis balanced beneath like a logan."

He showed where a large piece of granite slowly yielded under his weight. Then he retained it in position with a stick and made it firm. A black, perpendicular pit appeared, and upon the side of it rough stones protruded irregularly and formed a ladder.

"I'll go down," said Lee, "and light a candle. 'Tis day-proof and air-proof nearly; but you'll soon see and breathe when you're used to it."

He disappeared, and from beneath Grace heard him strike flint and steel, then saw the gleam of candlelight, and prepared to descend. The way proved easy enough to one of her activity, and soon she found herself beside John Lee, ten feet beneath the earth, in a large irregular chamber. The place was half natural, and half built of masonry now ruinous. A shaft of daylight from above revealed the steps, and the walls of the grotto

diffused a glimmering and golden radiance, so that it seemed to Grace that she had, indeed, descended into some storehouse of fabulous treasure. The shining moss* encrusted the cavern with its phosphorescent light, and water tinkled drop by drop unseen. Lee held above his head a candle that he had brought with him, and slowly details stole out of the gloom as their eyes focussed them.

For some time they found nothing more than John had already recorded. Then the desiccated remains of a dog in a corner made Grace exclaim with sorrow. The beast was fastened by its neck to a staple in the wall, and had clearly perished of starvation there. Close scrutiny revealed nine or ten money-bags perched aloft in nooks of the granite and holes of the broken building. Grace opened three, and all contained the same amount—one hundred pounds in gold. They restored every bag to its proper hiding-place, and continued their search. Yet the girl grew listless, and John Lee felt it by his senses, although he could not see her face.

Presently he hit his shins against a square box corded up with ropes, and his companion's heart throbbed as she thought that within an hour the Malherb amphora would be restored to its owner's hand. Then, while yet their new discovery remained unproved, a dull indifference again invaded her spirit; and John stood amazed to find her in no way disappointed when the box was found to contain nothing more precious than silver plate, sundry fine French snuff-boxes, watches and other trinkets.

"How brave you are!" he said. "Yet this is something worth discovering, for I'll wager my grandmother stole what is here from your family in times past."

"Be just to her. These French things perchance came from the prisoners. Tie them up carefully, and put them where you found them. Lovey must never guess that we have seen her secrets."

The man obeyed, and for half an hour they continued to make laborious and unrewarded search.

"'Tis a rogue's roost of a hole!" cried Lee. "You shall stop in it no longer, else you'll faint for lack of sweet air. 'Twill take much time and patience to exhaust all these crannies and clefts. My candle wanes."

* *The shining moss*: *Schistostega Osmundacea*.

"Let us depart then and visit the place again presently when time allows it."

"But you've lost your old eagerness," he said shortly.

"Not so. I care very much. Why, it is life or death almost for father. I know him to be sore driven for money."

"For your father. And is it nothing that it means life or death for Jack Lee? Have you forgotten what you yourself proposed? Oh, Grace, I'm afraid you have. I was to go to the wars——"

"The wars are like to be soon over now, dear John."

He made no answer, but lighted her to the steps and helped her to ascend them. Things recently suspected, like clouds lifting their furrowed foreheads above a remote horizon, grew daily nearer, and this experience within the treasure house had brought alarm to the very zenith of John Lee's mind. He was quick to see and to read each mood and humour of Grace Malherb. A hesitation before a kiss, a wayward breaking off in mid-speech, sudden ardours to atone for periods of coldness—all these shadows and half-shades of change, and of a sense of honour at war with overmastering love, had made themselves manifest in the girl; and Lee had read them while she was ignorant of their visible existence. At first such apparitions from her inner self merely mystified him, and the memory of them vanished with the mood that displayed them; but now more clearly he began to perceive that her highest graciousness followed upon coolness; that she was kindest after being least kind; that her outbursts of wild affection sprang not from love, but remorse. He battled against the belief; but it grew into a conviction, bitter and sure.

To-day, as he restored the cover-stone of the cave, he felt that another nail was struck into hope's coffin; and the thought wakened no indignation against Grace, but rather a mighty, melancholy anger with himself, that he had proved a man too feeble to hold his pearl against all comers.

"We must seek and seek and never despair," said Grace as they turned to ride homeward. "I feel positive that the amphora is there. If necessary you will have to hide in the den of the tigress yourself, John, and mark her when she supposes herself alone. Yet I should tremble for you. 'Twill be an awful day for that old woman when she loses the amphora. It is her god."

"If I got it, I could almost find it in my heart to break it."

"John Lee!"

"Why, I spoke as I felt. I'm beginning to see terrible things beyond your strength to hide, Grace. You would hide them if you could; you think in your heart that they are hidden; but they peep out and scourge me for my awful folly."

"What—what can you mean?"

"Don't think to deceive me, for you deceive yourself, dearest heart, if you do. I'm sensible in flashes, though mostly blind with you. I've read the riddle ever since he went away; now I've read the answer too."

"You wrong me to speak so. I have not changed to you, John; and to him I am nothing in the world."

"Be angry; be angry: I could rage, too: I could tear up the earth and—and—but I haven't the heart. I wouldn't hurt him excepting as man to man. I'd pray to Heaven to bring us face to face in war. I'd seek him out on land or sea—I'd——" He broke off, dropped his rein, and pressed his hands to his face. Then Grace rode close to him and touched his arm.

"You are unhappy, and I have made you so. This must not be, dear John. 'Tis life and death between—between lovers, to speak pure honesty at all times. Listen. He grew to love me. 'Twas the loneliness and friendlessness of his life. His eyes had seen no woman for years; therefore he made more of me than I deserved. He—he asked me to marry him some day; and I told him that I belonged to another. Then he went out of my life and blessed the unknown man who had been more fortunate than himself. That is the truth; and if I've been half-hearted and my wits a wool-gathering, forgive me, for the thought of Master Stark's sorrow has made me sad. I have much desired the war to end that he might go home to those who love him; and—and—don't look at me like that, John, for God knows I speak the truth to you. I hoped for his sake that the war might cease; for yours that it might not cease. Then I settled it by praying for peace with America—for his sake, and war with France—for yours. I'm only a fool, John, but I'm a truthful fool. There's nothing else in my silly heart but that."

"But there is—looking out of your eyes when you forget to shut them and hide it. My pretty darling—oh, God, to give you up! I cannot. I never will. A thousand heroes shall not take you——"

"Give me up—what do you mean?" she cried, and her heart beat fiercely.

"Why, 'tis true there must be no secrets betwixt us," he said in a gentle voice, "not so long as we are what we are to one another. 'Pure honesty' was your word. You tell me he asked you to marry him. And you tell me what you answered. I know all that right well without your telling me. But I've got to know more; I've got to know what you felt as well as said."

"Sorry for him—most truly sorry for him, dear John. I *did* like him. I'll own to that."

"Don't speak in a tone so light, sweetheart. 'Sweetheart' still a little longer. You women do think a tone of voice makes truth less true and falsehood less false. You say the same words in different voices and mean different by them. And a man must grow skilled in your sounds, like a hunter grows clever in the sounds of wild things, not counting the weight of the words. You say you liked him as you might like such a one that held your stirrup or opened a gate; but you and me are at a place now where you've got to speak sacred truth—solemn, slow, each word forged to last till doom. Did you love that man?"

"What is it to love a man?"

He bowed his head.

"I'm answered," he said. "Oh, Gracie dear—once mine, never mine—you know what 'tis to love a man; but you never did afore you saw him."

She marvelled that one who had yesterday driven maiden nails into a doorpost could see so deep. She remembered that it was she who had taught him to read. Tears came to her eyes and shining drops fell glittering on her horse's neck.

"You break my heart," she said.

"Please God, never! You didn't know; you mistook—what? you mistook something else for love. We were a boy and a girl; and I couldn't choose but worship—you were so lovely in soul and body—so gentle to me—so——"

"John," she declared solemnly, "I shall marry you or no man."

"You mean it with your whole heart, Gracie? Right well I know you do, and I love to hear you say it, and to see you think it while your beautiful, steadfast eyes fright the tears away."

"I love you, I love you indeed, John."

"I am content to be loved so," he answered slowly. "And maybe the time that's coming will show the colour of my love for you, since 'tis all too big for words. 'Twill take deeds to set it forth. It calls for deeds to show the pattern of a man's life, and love for you be all that's left of life for me henceforward."

"And
ove for
to set
fe, and

CHAPTER II

RHYME AND REASON

A FORTNIGHT after the visit to the old blowing-house, Mr. Peter Norcot arrived from Chagford to stay a while at Fox Tor Farm, and with him he brought more snow. This fact by no means troubled his level temper. He was neither more plain-spoken nor less poetical than usual as he walked out with Grace after noon, and reminded her of Maurice Malherb's intention that she should marry during the coming summer.

"Do not think, my dear girl, that Peter is blind. He knows all about Endymion. But positively John Lee as a husband!"

"'Tis not the first time I have bade you mind your own business, Peter. You have no right or reason to say these things to me. 'Tis worse than your rhymes. If you were half the man he is!"

"Hard words cannot break bones, or kiil love. Do what you please; say what you like,

" 'A very sandal I would be
To tread on—if trod on by thee.'

I can even rise superior to the necessity of being loved back. I love on and suffer on.

" 'It is not for our good in ease to rest;
Man, like to cassia, when bruised is best.'

"I will never love you, nor marry you. Is not that enough?"

"Too much—more than I could bear, if I believed it. But you are very young, Grace. I am often relieved to remember that you are too young to know your own mind."

She was going to deny it indignantly; but stopped, vividly conscious that he had come near the mark. Therefore sadness followed anger in her face and cooled her cheek.

"I do most seriously believe that before next year you will find me a continual joy," declared Peter. "'Tis high time the world should see what a husband awaits the making in me. Too long I've pined alone.

"Life's a short summer—man a flower,
He dies—alas! how soon he dies."

"He lives—alas! how long he lives!" So has many an unhappy wife breathed to her soul; and so should I."

"You might, indeed, if, like certain foolish but authentic virgins, you married out of your status. Now John Lee——"

"Have done, or I'll never speak to you more!" cried Grace passionately. "I had rather a thousand times marry John Lee than you; and if I please, I will."

"Frankly, my poppet, you are something too much of a child to marry anybody yet. 'Winter and wedlock tame maids and beasts.' A true West Country proverb that. But I'd be your lover still, not your master. Vile word! In sober honesty, however, you can be very provoking, mistress."

"Never less than now. Walk quicker and save your breath: more snow is coming."

The transient gleam of sun that had drawn them out on to the Moor departed, and snow began to fall again.

"I've wanted that to happen," said Mr. Norcot. "Now you shall hear a charming thing—not my own, I regret to say, but from Petronius Afranius—translated by one Smart. For its perfection you must make a snowball and hurl it at me."

"I'm in no mood for fooling."

"I beg; I implore. 'Twill be worth your pains."

She bent and picked up some snow.

"Don't miss my manly bosom, or you'll spoil ail," he said.

"There—I would it could cool your heart and freeze every thought of me out of your head!"

Grace flung the snow, and, letting it melt upon his coat, Mr. Norcot struck an attitude while he recited another rhyme. His eyes were full of the snow light and seemed harder and brighter than usual as he gazed at her.

"When, wanton fair, the snowy orb you throw,
I feel a fire before unknown in snow,
E'en coldest ice I find has pow'r to warm
My breast, when flung by Gracie's lovely arm!"

He swept off his hat and bowed : whereon she laughed outright.

"You should have been a player, for you are a most unreal man—for ever feigning to be something else than you are."

"Then marry me and find the kernel in the nut."

"How can I marry one I do not know?"

"Even such you should choose if you are wise : for the following sufficient reasons."

He prattled on, and presently Maurice Malherb joined them. The master had been that day in Prince Town upon various business, and he returned with news of a sort to interest his daughter. Now her eyes asked him a question and he answered it

"I paid my respects to Commandant Short at the Prison. He is a gentleman, but I think the business of that place will tax his authority. A saint would grow impatient with the knaves."

"And your visitor?" inquired Mr. Norcot. "'Twas a wonderful Providence that sent him here."

"The rascal! And yet Stark was one worthy of respect, had he been properly educated. He listened to me, as a young man should listen to his elders and betters. I could have found it in my heart to like him, but for his soaring nonsense and his disinclination to call treachery and revolt by their true names. Doubtless his ideas are the common property of his country. He suffered but a week's detention in the cachot and is now with his friends again."

Peter Norcot from under amber eyelashes studied Grace and found further material for interest.

"Another!" he said to himself. "An inflammable wench truly! Quick to catch fire from every torch but mine. Well, well—may war last until we are wedded. I ask no more."

"There's further news of a parochial sort," continued Malherb. "What think you, Grace? The old hag on the hill is off! She's left Siward's Cross and gone to a hovel near the Prison, where a few acres of land were to be let. She represented to the High Bailiff, the Duchy's man, that I'd robbed her of her best cattle lairs when I raised my boundaries! The old liar has money too—ay, and more than money."

"A wonderful creature. I mind her eyes that sparkled with

gorgonian fire ; her starved abode, and her penury. It called to my recollection Lucilius—his miser and his mouse :—

“ “You greedy rogue, what brings you to my house ?”
 Quoth an old miser to a little mouse ;
 “Friend,” says the vermin, “you need have no fear,
 I only lodge with you ; I *dine* elsewhere.” ”

Ha-ha-ha ! She feeds on snails and berries. Such was Sycorax.”

“She’s worth above twenty thousand pounds, nevertheless,” declared Malherb.

“Impossible !”

“True and not true. She has stolen my amphora. She confessed it when we were without witnesses.”

“Now here’s a matter indeed ! Can you be sure that she is not deceiving you ?”

“She has it. It is her very life.”

“Then we’ll be innocent murderers and deprive her of life at the first opportunity. Nothing shall become her life like the leaving of it.”

Malherb turned and addressed Peter out of Grace’s hearing. Indeed, the girl’s heart beat fast at this conversation, and she was busy with many private thoughts.

“You speak unselfishly, for the jewel will be my son’s—that is, Grace’s son’s. It must remain under a Malherb’s roof for ever, not under yours, Peter.”

“Most just. The amphora is an heirloom.”

Norcot glanced at Grace and marked her profound indifference. A wave of real indignation made his forehead hot and much astonished him. It was a revelation of himself. Then his mind chanced to roam towards Prince Town ; he thought upon Cecil Stark and speculated whether the American could be of any service. While he thought clear prose he continued to utter epigrams for Grace’s amusement.

“ “The wanton snowflakes to her breast
 Flew down, like birds into their nest,
 And, vanquished by the whiteness there,
 For grief they thawed into a tear.” ”

Then he turned to Malherb again.

“The amphora must be recovered at any cost. I need not ask

whether you have plans. Do you seek assistance, or undertake the affair single-handed?"

"I work alone. Bow Street runners would not run far on Dartmoor. Lovey Lee may well be left to my mercies. It shall never be said that an old and ignorant woman outwitted Maurice Malherb."

"Spoken well! I'll wager the amphora will grace dear Annabel's cabinet before wool-shearing. To think of that priceless fragment of glass in the keeping of such a bag of bones!"

"And to know that she gets joy of it," said Grace, "that is the amazing matter. She, who eats vermin and wears old sacks, to find her greatest earthly pleasure in the plump Cupids upon that antique!"

"Human nature is full of these tricks," answered her father. "I have studied such freakish traits in mankind so long that nothing now has power to surprise me."

"Not even yourself? Now I, though so near to forty, can yet astonish myself. I have done so within this hour," confessed Peter. "As to Lovey," he continued, "she'll clothe herself with ashes as well as sackcloth when she loses her treasure."

"Well, well, the snow increases. Hasten home, the pair of you," answered Malherb; then he left them together, and turned to an outlying shed where two men worked.

"What a fate!" murmured Norcot when he had gone off; "what a pleasing fate, Grace, to be imprisoned here, even as Cecil Stark was imprisoned! How gladly I'd make exchange with him—the rough with the smooth."

She made no answer, and he continued—

"Talking of Loves, 'twas a pretty thing that Antonius Tebaltius wrote, and Thompson paraphrased, and Norcot improved—

" 'Venus whipt Cupid t'other day,
For having lost his bow and quiver;
The which he'd given both away
To Gracie by a Dartmoor river.
'Mamma! you wrong me while you strike,'
Cried weeping Cupid, 'for 'tis true
That you and she are so alike,
I thought that I had given 'em you!'"

"You've missed the gate while you chattered," said Grace; "now we must climb over the wall."

"I generally do miss the gate with you," he answered
"Don't these beautiful pearls that I utter move even a spark of pity?"

"Of pity—yes."

"'Tis akin to love."

"As often akin to contempt."

"In mean natures; never in yours."

He helped her over the wall, then spoke again as they hurried on with heads bent to the snow.

"'Twas that young American then? Why so silent about it? Why ashamed to tell frankly who 'tis you really do love? I blazon my emotions to the world and do it proudly. Can you not be as open?"

"I hate everybody; and it's all your fault."

"Well, well; mend your pace; we shall be frozen. And if you hate me, change every garment that you wear. I much fear that you are wet and cold."

This practical thought touched the man in Grace and softened her a little.

"I wish I could love you, Peter, for it would be better for me and happier for us all if I did. But I never, never shall."

"Well, try to tolerate me—fitfully. Even a fitful toleration is something, and perhaps more beautiful than a fixed and steady flame—just as moonlit clouds are lovelier than the moon herself."

They talked awhile longer, then reached the house. Grace retired immediately to don dry clothes, while Mrs. Malherb spoke with Peter.

"Lord! what a poet was marred when you commenced wool merchant," said she, while he drank a jorum of hot spirits and held his coat to the fire.

"Nay, nay, Annabel, the same man can serve both mistresses. Thus, if I might but come at it, I would weave wool shorn off the sheep in paradise for Grace's tender limbs; and I would clothe her mind also with a robe spun of the best and the most beautiful thoughts to be gleaned from books. But she'll none of me nor my stock-in-trade. 'Tis the weather, not my prayers, that makes her wear flannel next her skin. Yet I told her that I'd gladly be the wether that furnished the wool."

"And what said she?" inquired the lady.

"I will be honest with you," answered Peter. "I will conceal nothing. She replied in one word, 'Baa!' Believe me, Annabel, that never since this mundane egg was hatched did such a maddening maiden appear to torment honest men."

CHAPTER III

THE OATH

THE reign of the new Commandant opened auspiciously at Prince Town, for Captain Short came to his work with understanding and sympathy. He was still young, and his heart had not grown callous before the spectacle of human misery. Compassion filled him at the sufferings of those half-naked hordes who wandered through the War Prison; he countermanded many of his predecessor's egregious enactments, and stated in feeling terms to the Board of Transport the conditions that he discovered. The zeal of a reformer first marked his achievements; then he grew discouraged, erred, lost heart, and fell from his own ideals.

Cecil Stark served a term of imprisonment in the cachot, after which he returned to his compatriots and found familiar faces missing. Some among his acquaintance were exchanged; not a few had passed away. Caleb Carberry perished soon after his punishment; Burnham had also suffered as a result of that awful penance in ice and granite; but he was now restored to health. Of the Seven, two were dead, and James Knapps remained hidden with Lovey Lee.

Now, even as the lowest note of their sad hearts had sounded, came light upon the darkness of the Americans. While they hung their heads and mourned as men forgotten of their country; while hundreds daily threatened Mr. Blazey with letters and vowed to transfer allegiance to Britain if he did not better their case, good news arrived, and the first written communication ever received from their representative reached the prisoners.

Cecil Stark read Blazey's message aloud in the exercise yard of No. 4, and jubilant crowds gave ear to it.

"Fellow Citizens," wrote the Agent, "I am authorised by the Government of the United States to allow you one penny half-penny per day for the purpose of procuring you tobacco and

soap, which will commence being paid from the first day of last January, and I earnestly hope it will tend towards a great relief in your present circumstances."

A roar of delight greeted the announcement. Men cheered and wept, flung their red caps into the air, fell upon each other's necks, embraced, danced wildly, sang and laughed.

"Not forgotten! Not forgotten!" was the burden of their cry. A great emotion of thankfulness animated the mass and woke fire in the meanest spirit amongst them. The actual blessing of this pittance seemed less to that forlorn gathering than the thought that had inspired it. A link, sorely tested, stood firm. Now all again gloried in their sonship with the mother country;

Congress had remembered. Every man viewed the news through the glass of his own nature; but pride in their nation glowed upon each face, and trust renewed uplifted their sinking hearts. From the powder-monkeys and negroes to the Committee of six leading men now appointed to administer the moneys, all rejoiced and blessed their native land. Their trustful natures shone out of them, and Congress received many a cheer; Captain Short was also saluted; and even the sluggard Blazey won his meed.

"Durn the old country; it ha'n't thrown us over after all," said David Leverett to a companion. "I guess my first dollop of money will go in drink, for we've done so long without soap that we can easy keep dirty a while more. We've come out of a tarnation tight snarl at last, and nobody's better pleased than me."

"Such a swipe ob money, gem'me!" cried Cuffee. "De Lord Him send back Marse Stark; den he send free cents a day. Our own mudders won't know us, nebber no more."

"We-alls shall be eating money presently," laughed Leverett's friend. "Things is on the bounce for sartin. We've got our monkey up agin; and if we can't follow that chap's lead—Stark I mean—and hev another try to quit this place, 'tis pity."

"No smouch him," admitted Leverett. "If there's any hanky-panky in the wind, we'll do well ter let him boss it. 'Tis the differ between a man well eggicated and you and me. We'd be as good as him if we'd had his luck and his money."

"Maybe we should, maybe we should not," answered the other. "Anyway, if we pull together and let him lead, I lay

he'll hit on a contraption ter get every doodle of us clear of this."

Something prophetic marked the sailor's speech, for within two months of that conversation Cecil Stark, Burnham, one Ira Anson and other leaders in No. 4, were maturing their historic scheme to liberate the whole of the American prisoners at one stroke. Enthusiasm, like a subterranean fire, burnt in every man when the project was whispered abroad, and each entered upon his part with determination and courage. Until this enterprise, defections, while rare, were yet regularly recorded. Nearly a hundred Americans had entered British service rather than endure the plagues of longer durance; but henceforth none could be persuaded, despite well-directed efforts to win them.

We are now concerned with an extraordinary undertaking. The Seven were separated by death and other accidents, but James Knapps was free; and henceforth the boatswain of the *Marblehead* enjoyed an importance beyond his ambitions. In connection with Lovey Lee, Knapps was able greatly to assist his countrymen in their endeavour; and first, he proved by the fact of his personal safety that Mrs. Lee remained, after all, faithful to the cause of the prisoners. It was agreed, therefore, that Lovey might be further trusted, and she immediately received a gift of ten guineas; while within a fortnight, and upon payment of a much greater sum, she accepted Stark's proposals and prepared to alter her manner of life accordingly.

The markets reopened when the weather broke, and a brisk correspondence with the miser and James Knapps was established from inside the Prison. Thus Lovey learned that her co-operation must be secured at closer quarters than Siward's Cross. She was bidden to establish herself as near the War Prison as possible, and chance enabled her to take up the identical position desired. Mention has already been made of a ruinous cottage immediately without the Prison walls. Some acres of rough land went along with this deserted "newtake," and the authorities were well content to let the worthless place to a tenant. Instantly grasping the significance of the manoeuvre, and alive to the importance of blinding all official eyes, Lovey, for the first time in her life, spent the prodigious sum of twenty pounds in a week. She had the old cottage thatched and rendered storm-proof: she ploughed up a part of the land and fenced all in. She continued to traffic

among the Americans, and no question of her integrity had ever arisen. Her stock increased and she became one of the most important among the small merchants. She sold tobacco and potatoes; she also smuggled many prohibited articles, such as candles, alcohol, oil. She paid private taxes upon these things to the turnkeys, but nobody in high authority ever heard of the matter. Lovey even made the Commandant a friend, and regularly provided his table with poultry. She deceived him by her independent manners; and he fell into the common error of supposing that one who is laconic, businesslike and dour, must of necessity be honest.

A general escape having been planned in every detail, conventions were ordered, the plot revealed, and the Americans sworn to secrecy. Such liberty did these prisoners of war enjoy within their own confines, that their assemblies were never interrupted nor their meetings for entertainment opposed. On this occasion, however, special guards were set by the captives themselves and every precaution taken to prevent surprise.

Then Stark addressed his fellows, for by common consent the ringleaders appointed him their spokesman.

"Gentlemen," he said, "as honest Americans, born under the Flag of Freedom, it becomes us to attempt escape. Our condition of late has been much bettered, and I, for one, owe no grudge against our present guards or their Commandant, Captain Short. He is honourable, and does what he may to lessen our tribulation: he is also generous; he has increased our privileges, and by throwing open the new yards and admitting us to larger quarters for exercise and the amusement of games, he has earned universal blessings. Our bill of health is greatly improved, thanks to him; he has, indeed, put fresh life into us. Yet are we prisoners, and, upon careful study of the journals smuggled to us, it is clear that no immediate hope of peace or of further exchange can be held out. Our country is suffering a period of sea losses, and it is not in the moment of these reverses that she will tune her ear to peace. Our circumstances have, therefore, prompted us to plan a scheme of escape, and we now submit it to your opinions. Immediately the pending changes in our disposal are made, and we have wider fields to work in, we mean to dig under these walls a tunnel, that must be two hundred and eighty feet long. It is planned and calculated most fully. It

will be sunk in Prison No. 6, and, concerning the exit of it on to the Moor, no more need yet be said than that we have stout friends outside who will look to that. Our numbers, as you know, increase very rapidly, because our ships have fallen upon a bout of ill-luck; but ever recollect that these relays of our countrymen from Plymouth and elsewhere only represent American mishaps. Our successes are hidden from us; yet our hearts tell us that they exist and occur. Many English doubtless languish in American prisons. So thus it stands. I speak to two thousand men, and I ask them all to swear secrecy before Almighty God."

A dozen Bibles were circulated, and there arose a strange and solemn murmur throughout the company as every man swore to his neighbour that he would maintain absolute silence concerning this matter, and that neither by word nor pen, by look nor gesture, would he divulge the secret to any among those set in authority.

"To break this oath is death," said Stark. "You have now sworn to keep the secret; and we, your leaders, have also sworn that the man who gives one hint of this business to those whose duty it is to stop it, will be cut off. He shall not escape. In ancient Sparta there was a society called Crypteia who slew by night. The Helots perished at their hands, but none knew who struck the blow. They only left corpses behind them. So will it be with us. Eyes are upon every one of us, and he that watches has eyes upon him also. A traitor will most surely fall. He will vanish from amongst us; his place will be empty, and none will ever know where his dust lies rotting. I who speak to you have been once betrayed with others whom death has since freed. Woe to that man! Let him tremble yet while he hears me, for his hour will surely come."

The meeting disbanded, and a small sub-committee sat to select five-and-twenty trustworthy persons who should fulfil the important office of spies upon the majority. Many refused this unpleasant work, until it was explained to them that they incurred no shame. Among those finally chosen were Leverett and Samuel Cuffee. The negro had work apportioned him with his kindred, while it was the duty of Leverett and others to keep in touch with the general throng, glean public opinion and report upon any sign of unrest, disaffection, or other danger. A martial system marked

the plot. Every sentry and turnkey was under close surveillance; the digging parties were chosen for their strength and sobriety; while the work itself had been so planned that it proceeded night and day without intermission. A pit was first sunk perpendicularly to the depth of twenty feet, and then pursued upon a horizontal plane. This tunnel, if extended for ninety yards, would clear the foundations of the outer wall and reach beneath Lovey Lee's cottage.

While Stark and his companions cautiously opened their enterprise in Prison No. 6, to which they were now admitted, James Knapps, snugly hidden with Mrs. Lee, was engaged upon a similar task. Here, when Lovey kept watch, the boatswain laboured; and if she went abroad: to the prison, or upon other business, he hid himself closely and smoked his pipe in a hole under the roof of the cottage.

As for Cecil Stark, a passionate zest marked his attitude to the plot, and for mingled reasons he permitted it to fill his mind. But greater than patriotic ardour or personal thirst for freedom, was the desire to escape his own thoughts. He believed that liberty could never more be anything but a word to him, for his soul was for ever fast bound. One girl's face haunted him; one voice rang musical upon his ear by day and night. He suffered enough; but no man guessed it.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN TAKES HIS ROAD

TO move her household goods from the hut by Siward's Cross was no great matter for Lovey Lee. A donkey carried all and found the burden light. The things about which her life's interest centred were buried deep in Hangman's Hollow, and her only hesitation, when the great enterprise at the War Prison was broken to her, arose out of the knowledge that she must now abide three miles further from her treasure-house. To this fact, however, the old woman grew reconciled, when she considered the nature of the promised reward. She settled down beneath the Prison walls; and now not the least of her grievances was the enormous appetite of Mr. James Knapps. He worked exceedingly hard and insisted upon having wholesome food and plenty of it.

"We're not all built like you, ma'am, ter do our stint of work on ditch-water and shell-snails," he explained. "Victuals and drink I'll have; else I must grumble ter them over the wall. I can't dig my best on offal."

There fell a morning when John Lee visited his grandmother, and she saw by his face that a climax had come in his fortunes. He was gloomy and sad, yet of his own affairs he said nothing until Lovey mentioned them.

"I'm on a private errand," he said, "and since 'tis too early yet to see the prisoners, I thought I'd drop in and learn how you're faring."

She suspected that he was sent to spy by his master.

"I keep body and soul together, an' that's all I ever shall do," she answered, little thinking that John Lee had counted her guineas but a few weeks before. "Even so I have to thank they Yankees to the Prison."

He marvelled at her cunning.

"Do you hear anything of that fine gentleman, Master Cecil Stark?" he inquired.

"Ah, you was all in love with him to Fox Farm, I hear. I wish there was more like him."

John did not answer, and his grandmother jeered.

"I see how 'tis! Your nose be out of joint. What did I tell you, Jack? Broken hearts—broken fiddlesticks! Ban't the wench's heart as have broke, anyhow. So her throwed you over for a properer man?"

"No, by God! But——"

"You'm minded to let her off her bargain? Then the bigger fool you!"

She hit the truth in her brutal fashion. Lee had not trusted himself to pursue the matter of his attachment; yet, as time progressed, he saw more clearly what Grace strove with might and main to conceal. The accesses of her affection, the thousand little kindly thoughts for him—all wrote truth in letters of fire upon his aching heart. True love had acted differently—had claimed as well as given; and he knew, despite her assurance oftentimes repeated, that her attitude was founded on another impulse. Now, after grief and pain, his thoughts moved slowly to Cecil Stark. In turn he was attracted by and repulsed from the prospect of speech with the young prisoner. Finally he braced himself to the ordeal; yet he knew not what he would say when they stood face to face. He felt as a man in a dream at this period. A most unreal and monstrous task lay before him. Deliberately he was turning his back upon all that made life precious: consciously he was hastening out of day into eternal night. He chafed against the noble impulse that drove him onward; for a season he resisted it; then Grace Malherb's own steadfast purposes warmed his inspiration. Her delicacy, her gentleness, her courage cried to him. Must he prove less brave and more selfish than she?

It was indeed sheer suffering that supported the girl now; but her strength rose superior to it, and only one who knew and loved her as this man knew and loved, had guessed at the things hidden in her heart. The torture simulated Grace to a surface brilliance, as a bird will sing out of pure misery in sight of his robbed nest. Her eyes were ever bright, but unshed tears made them so: her plots and plans were ceaseless and sanguine; but he knew that

she rushed into them to escape from her heart. Love, indeed, had found her at last, but she struggled fiercely to shut him out since he had come too late. She never wearied of plans concerning the Malherb amphora, and of the future for John Lee when he should discover it. And he humoured her and himself a little longer, so that she scarcely realised that he had grasped the truth, despite his first sure guess thereat.

Now the story was told. He had wandered through the last autumnal glade of his fool's paradise; he had witnessed the red sunset of his dying romance; and he stood patient and strong under the cold starlight at the end.

John Lee was come to speak with Stark, for at certain times in the War Prison visitors were permitted to enter and have conversation or transact business with the captives. A tall grille of iron alone separated them, but to this grating all men might approach on certain days and traffic with the imprisoned for those trifles which they wrought and sold to any purchaser. Work-boxes, dinner mats, hand-screens, bone toys and ornaments they manufactured; and many persons came from Plymouth and other towns to see the spectacle of the great moorland limbo and carry from it a me memento of the sufferers there. Nefarious and doubtful trades were also practised in the secret fastnesses of this gaol. Exceeding good imitations of the eighteenpenny and three-shilling pieces then current passed into the world from Prince Town, and forged bank notes also circulated. Venal soldiery helped the prisoners in the business of uttering base money; but such simple and honest trash as passed to the visitors between the bars of the grille, was openly sold.

Hither from his grandmother's cottage came Lee, and soon he noted the tall form of Stark standing with Burnham and Ira Anson. They had nothing to sell, but watched the visitors with interest. Then Cecil caught sight of John Lee, hastened to the barrier and shook hands heartily through the bars.

"Well met, well met," he said. "I'm right glad to see you, Jack. Would that I could give you such a welcome as your master gave to me!"

"I hope you are well and strong again, Mr. Stark."

"Well enough——"

The American looked at Lee with intense scrutiny and wondered

how much or little he might know concerning the affairs of his mistress.

"All are happy at Fox Tor Farm, I trust?"

"Well enough," answered the other, as Stark had answered him.

"That means not absolutely well," replied Cecil quickly. "Miss Malherb—all at least is well with her? Yet—Mr. Norcot. 'Tis intolerable, you know, Jack Lee, that I should speak of that man except to bless him for his goodness. Nevertheless—Miss Malherb—but this is none of your business I doubt?"

"It won't be much longer; for the present it is," said John. "I know she hates Mr. Peter Norcot. She's bound to hate him in self-defence. But, nevertheless, 'tis intended she shall marry him within six months."

"Yet there's a man she—she loves. It's too terrible! She suffers—she must suffer horribly. And this other—why doesn't he come forward and sweep Norcot out of her path? What clay is this creature made of that he holds back?"

"The man?"

"Do you know him?"

"I do."

"Then tell him from me—but what's the use of bellowing like a pent-up bull? Can't you, at least, assure him from yourself that he must be up and doing? You're in your lady's good graces—therefore justify her trust. Seek this laggard and explain how the land lies. Maybe 'tis her tyrant father he fears."

"The man knows everything. He can't help her."

"Cannot! What's the matter with him? Has he no arms, nor legs, nor courage? Is he made of gingerbread? Oh, if I—— But perhaps I speak ignorant of facts. Maybe he's chained fast, too."

"Yes, he's fast enough."

"Then 'tis your duty to do what a man may, Jack. You, at least, are free as well as faithful; and in love with Miss Malherb also, I'll wager. You must love her if you're a man."

"I do love her."

"And can see her and speak to her every day of your blessed life! Oh, if I might but help you: if I might come between her and trouble——"

He broke off and ended his aspirations to himself. Then Lee spoke.

"Could you escape from this place again?"

Stark started and looked round about him.

"For that cause—yes."

"There may be good reason why you should presently—not yet. The first thing——"

Here Cecil interrupted.

"'Good reason—good reason'? You know so much that you must know more. And you must tell me more."

"I'll tell you this. We are at cross purposes. I let you talk because—because it amused me in a strange sort of painful way. But the truth——"

He hesitated, and the full, fatal significance of the next few words impressed itself vividly upon his soul. There was no blinking it. The fact stared pitiless. He stood at the cross roads of fortune, and with his next word to Cecil Stark, his own path would be chosen, his own desire renounced, for ever.

The American saw that great emotions fought in this man's mind, and waited for him to speak.

"The truth 's that Miss Malherb is a free woman—so far as love is concerned."

"She told me when I——" began Stark; then he looked guilty and held his peace.

But Lee understood.

"When you asked her to marry you? I know. She could not say otherwise then. Bide bold and patient; the time will come when she may answer differently."

The other was terribly moved. A great expiration burst from him, half an oath of astonishment, half a hallelujah.

"In God's name what are you that dare to speak these great things?" he asked under his breath, as though he apostrophised a sexless spirit.

"Her servant—her slave. At least I tell truth. Thus it stands—that other—he will not marry her."

"And she still loves him? This is damnable! Let me but meet that man!"

"No need to rage against him. He's a harmless fool enough and would be your friend—anybody's friend but his own. 'Twill be no grief to her, a joy rather to find that she's mistaken in him."

"She never really loved him then?"

"She didn't know—she didn't know. You forget how young she is. I think she loved him with an innocent, baby love; I think she'll always love him a little for the sake of—but let that go—she's free—free to listen to a lover. Now you know what I came to tell you."

Stark stared silently up into the sky and John Lee saw a light dawn upon his face, as though some angel passed in the air and shone upon him. Then the prisoner turned to Lee and spoke slowly and solemnly, for he was awestruck at the magnitude of this great revealment.

"If I owned a kingdom it should be yours this day. Please God I can do something, though nothing worthy such news. If you will, you shall have an acre of good Vermont earth presently for every word you've spoken to me. Yet earth's a pitiful payment for the hope of heaven on earth you've given to me."

He knew not the sufferings he wakened or the wounds he tore open. Voices laughed in John Lee's ears and told him that he had sold his heart.

"Leave that," he said roughly. "You mistake me. I'm here for love of her—not you. Listen, then I'll be gone. You must get in touch with her very gradual and delicate. I can go between you."

"I see; I see. What a learned man you are in these matters, Jack! With your Apollo's face you've had your experiences, I'll wager! But wait; I'll be gone and write a letter—just a reminder that I live. I'll sell you a little bone windmill I made for a turnkey's child; and in it I'll place a note. You must give me a coin for it, but you shall find a larger one inside for yourself."

He was gone, and Lee waited, seeing but not perceiving the throng around him, hearing but not heeding the medley of voices and the tramp of many feet. Aloft in the blue a hawk hung poised upon trembling wings. It surveyed the bustling scene, then glided away to the Moor. The American, David Leverett, approached Lee and invited him to purchase a little mat of woven grass.

"Here, young feller," he said. "I reckon now your gal's just fretting herself silly for a keepsake, whoever she is; and you'd best not displeasure her by refusing. This was woven by a one-armed man, you see, and that makes it worth twice as much as any other mat. So 'tain't no manner o' use ter offer less than

ten cents for it. Hev a squint at the workmanship—not bad for a crab with one claw—eh?”

Lee shook his head and the sailor gibed :—

“Not ten cents! Then by God! you don’t love her, and she shall hear of it. Come now—fourpence, then—only four dirty pennies. Think o’ the kisses she’ll give for it.”

Still Lee declined, his thoughts elsewhere, and Leverett cursed him for a fool, shook his stump in John’s face, and turned to find a customer.

A few minutes la’er, as bugles were sounding for the visitors to depart, Cecil Stark came back with a little toy made of mutton bones.

“Hand me any small coin you have about you,” he said. “You’ll find a billet for Miss Malherb and two guineas for yourself in the drawer at the bottom.”

These simple words hurt poor John cruelly, for their business-like and even sordid tenour jarred upon his own great renunciation in a way that Stark little guessed. Lee’s heart was numb; his mind had grown dreamy and incoherent now. Mechanically he took the windmill and handed Cecil a shilling. Then, without any word of farewell, he turned away and followed the departing crowds. He heard Cecil Stark say “God bless you!” as he went; but only a strange loathing of the money he carried rose in his mind. This mean detail of two guineas fretted him to madness. He could not see the matter as Cecil saw it; he jealously muffled his reason, and refused to behold in himself henceforth no more than that necessary thing—a lover’s messenger.

Slowly he returned over the Moor towards Fox Tor Farm, and the thought of all that he had lost swept down upon him like a storm in the wilderness. Temptations shook him then. He turned the toy of bone about in his hand. He might have crushed it and stamped it down under the bog in a moment. But nothing could crush the deed done. He relapsed into a sullen and ferocious sorrow. His feet dragged under him. A sense of age swept over him, and along with it came bitter remorse that he had flung his fate away to another man and set no store upon fortune’s priceless gifts. A savage loathing of himself awoke in his spirit. He hated the flesh that he was clad in, poured contumely upon his own head and cried out aloud in the loneliness that his repulsive weakness proclaimed him what

he was: a bastard and a creature fit only for the scorn of men. He cumbered the earth. None was the better for him. The cur that fled from a hauger had greater courage; the baying foxhound more pluck, than had he. His grandmother's words in the past returned to his memory and clashed in his head like bells rung by demons. This was how he had employed her wisdom; this was how he had cast away his grand opportunity to win fortune and love.

Siward's Cross rose before him and he stood near the home of his childhood. He sat awhile beside the hoary monument and leant his back against it. Then he turned and examined it with listless eyes, and watched the shadow cast by its squat arms darken the heather. Long he delayed; and, at last, as the sun, turning westward, warmed the Moor and touched the cross with a gentle and roseate glory, the benignant, evening hour found out John Lee, soothed his giant sorrow and set its seal upon him. This venerable stone had power to comfort the lad's grief. He began to think less of himself and more of Grace Malherb. Her joy grew out of the sunset light: her young life's story opened before him; he saw a ribbon of pure gold stretching down into the West, where the sun was setting beyond a distant sea; and he knew that it was her road home.

Great words came to his recollection: "He that loseth his life shall save it," was written for him in the soft and mellow earth-shadows of sunset.

"My life shall be lost in her life," he said; "and if she's saved, I'm blessed above all deserving."

CHAPTER V

STARS AND STRIPES

WHEN Mr. Mordecai Cockey entered Fox Tor Farm the spirit of Grace Malherb sank within her. Had an executioner appeared, she had felt no greater horror; for Mr. Cockey was a journeyman tailor, and, according to the custom of that time upon Dartmoor, when clothes were needed, the maker of them came to his customers and took up his abode in farm or hamlet until local requirement was satisfied. A month's work or more awaited Mr. Cockey, and first among the articles to be fashioned with his skilful needle were certain gowns—a part of Grace's wedding trousseau; for all men now knew that within the space of a few weeks Miss Malherb was to become Mrs. Peter Norcot.

Two trestles and a dozen boards completed Mr. Cockey's professional requirements in the servants' hall; and here, day by day, he sat and snipped and sewed, and sewed and snipped. He was a very full-bodied, pallid man, with flabby cheeks, mournful, watery eyes and a puzzled expression. He came from Totnes, and often mourned that his itinerant labours required him to be much away from his wife and family. This tailor descended in direct line from Mordecai Cockey, the famous seventeenth-century bell-founder; and when he heard any one of those seven great bells that the bygone Cockey had cast, he would lift his head where the musical monster thundered from some Devon belfry, and nod respectfully, as to the spirit of his ancestor.

Now Mordecai worked at the wardrobe of the farm, and, elevated upon his trestles, held a sort of conference, and told the things life taught him. Once during the dinner hour, several farm folk were at Mr. Cockey's feet, as he sat cross-legged amid his tools and ate his meal of bread and cheese. Meat he might

have had in plenty, but he explained to Dinah Beer that his sedentary life had long since turned him vegetarian.

"By God's blessing I can stomach cheese," he said, "an' if so be as a body's humours will cope with vinnied cheese, he may hope for a long life."

"Be my breeches mended, Mister?" asked Tom Putt. "'Cause if so, I should like to don 'em afore afternoon. I've got a riding job as'll take me to Holne by-an'-by."

"They'm done. I've double-seated 'em for 'e."

Mr. Cockey nodded towards the garment.

"You'm always as good as your word, I'm sure," said Harvey Woodman, "though how them fat hands of yours—as look more like bunches of parsnips than hands—can do such finnick work makes me wonder."

"Ah, I dare say a lot of things make you wonder," answered the tailor. "Not but what I envy you your way of life, for 'tis healthier'n mine. You chaps, as till the earth, have no time to fret your intellects like what I do. Ploughmen never band together and make trouble in the world. Tailors be a very thinking race; but you'll not find they takes a hopeful view of human nature."

"Then they'm small-minded," said Beer firmly: "for, looked at all round, human nature be a very hopeful thing."

Mordecai Cockey sighed.

"You may be in the right. Perhaps building of clothes do narrow the heart, for we grow apt to think 'tis our feathers make the birds. For that matter the world counts us but light. We'm slighted tradesmen, we tailors. They say it takes nine of us to make a man; though it only takes one to get a long family, as I know to my cost. Thirteen children have I, an' all with the tailoring spirit in 'em except my eldest son."

"An' what might he be doing?" asked Putt.

"Well, he's a baker."

"A very honest trade."

"That's just what it ban't," declared Mr. Cockey. "They'm sly as lawyers; an' there's a damned sight more in bread than corn nowadays. A man may be eating his own great gran'father; as I've said openly down to Totnes, an' nobody contradicted me."

"God's word! They don't rob churchyards for their bones, do

they?" asked Woodman. "If I thought that, I'd never take bit nor sup to Totnes no more."

"There's ways an' ways," explained the tailor. "Bone goes in; as thus. Man is earth, an' earth is bread; an' when they take the top spit off what was thought to be an old burial place of the ancients an' turn it over an' make a wheat field—what then?"

"'Tis just short of a cannibal act!" declared Woodman; "for they never buried deep in them days."

"Rubbish, Harvey!" answered Beer. "We ourselves be only the fatness of the earth when all's said. 'Tis nature's plan; an' I see no harm in it at all."

"More don't I for that matter," declared Cockey. "With my well-knowed feelings about human nature, you won't be surprised if I say that many a man's better as corn or cabbage than ever he was on two legs."

"Then you don't believe in God, same as me," said Kekewich grinly.

"Not at all, not at all," answered the other. "I'm only saying a man's body is mud, an' his clothes is mud in shape of wool or flax; an' he's all mud to the eye; but as to his soaring spirit I won't hazard a word. A tailor must believe in God. 'Twas Him as gave the word for clothes an' put Adam an' his lady into their first shifts of His own Almighty making."

"You meet men whose spirits be the muddiest part about 'em, all the same," declared Kekewich.

"So you will; but every thinking creature turned of fifty must have come across folks with souls looking out of their eyes. Why, I've seed pictures in big houses where the paint had a soul! Ess fay—beautiful dead an' gone women have pretty nigh spoke to me where I sat an' worked below their gold frames."

"I'll never believe in souls," said the older man. "We'm a vile race, an' no God of Heaven would ever make such a poor bargain as to overbuy such trash as us at the price of His only Son. Why for should He? If He'd but lifted His finger, He might have had us for nought."

"The devil must be itching for you, Kek," said Harvey Woodman.

"You'm no hand at argument, Mr. Kekewich," continued Cockey; "for halt the beauty of argufying is to hold close to the

matter. You was saying as you didn't believe in souls : an' I was saying as I did. Well, take an instance. There's Miss Grace Malherb for who I be making this here lovely vest. Be that bowerly maiden no more than the pink-an'-white china dust she goes in? If so, she's no better'n this bit of flowered silk."

"People can be good or evil, an' yet have no more souls than dogs," began the head man; but at that moment Miss Malherb herself entered as a bell rang to tell that the dinner hour was done.

The labourers departed to their work, and Grace was left with Mr. Cockey. She came to beg a secret favour and now whispered it into the tailor's ear, though there was none but himself to hear it.

"If you command, it must be done," he said. "I know a mariner to the harbour at Totnes, where the Holne timber goes down Dart to build His Majesty's great warships. The man has goodly stores, an' will sell me so much bunting as I want—red, white and blue. I'm going down to-morrow for the day to get more cloth."

"And, before all things, keep it secret. Not a whisper!"

"It shall be as you please, Miss. An' I'll ax you to take this here vest along, an' put it on, an' let me see if 'tis all right."

"You work so dreadfully quick! You're sewing a shroud,—d'you know that, Mordecai?"

"What a word! How comes it you want stuff for flags then?"

"Ah! 'tis not for my wedding day. Now, if you could fashion me a pair of wings to fly with——"

Mr. Cockey drew a thread through his needle.

"Fine clothes don't make a happy marriage, I know," he said : "but they do put heart into a wedding party, an' speaking generally, they'm a great softener of life to females. A parcel from me has dried many tears—poor fools."

"I'm not married yet, however."

"No, but—Lord! what's that?"

The tailor sat with his back to the window, and, unseen by him, a horseman had ridden up to it. Now he stopped, rapped upon the casement with his whip, doffed his hat and grinned at Grace. The glass was not good, and it distorted a countenance generally esteemed amiable and handsome.

"Mercy on us, what a chap! 'Tis a face like to Satan!" cried Cockey.

"That's the gentleman my father wishes me to marry," answered Grace quietly.

"Then I'm sure I beg pardon, Miss. 'Twas a twist in the glass."

"You caught sight of his soul—not his face," she said. The girl had turned pale, and now she hastily left the room.

Much had happened since Mr. Norcot's last visit, and soon accident was to enlighten him in certain directions. Mordecai Cockey went off on the following morning and returned in eight-and-forty hours with various bales and packages. One of these he handed to Grace in private, and she conveyed the parcel unseen to her chamber. Its nature will presently appear. For the moment it suffices to say that Miss Malherb's secret concerned Cecil Stark, with whom, thanks to John Lee, she had now established a correspondence. Their letters Grace showed to John openly for some time, but, perceiving that they were the joy of two lives, the messenger refused to read these missives more. Grace still stood at the parting of the ways, nor knew that John Lee's road was already chosen. The relation of three became difficult beyond endurance; Stark understanding that John had access to all letters, chafed at the mystery, and naturally found little to admire in such control. He was meditating action when a sudden incident upset their former relations and quickened the catastrophe.

Peter Norcot, upon this, his last visit to Fox Tor Farm before the wedding, pursued a customary course and endeavoured by imperturbable good humour and kindness to soften his lady's temper. He well knew the futility of the task, yet persevered.

On the night of his arrival Grace had a headache and did not appear, whereupon he wrote her a letter and sent it to her by the hand of Mary Woodman.

"Dear Light of my Eyes," said he, "I am quite broken-hearted to know that Mordecai Cockey has a greater place in your affections just now than any other man. It is the Tailor's Hour! Well, well! I must be patient. Yet what can a tailor do to make Grace more graceful? Here's a beautiful epigram from our own Devon poet, Browne. I transcribe it for you:—

“‘To CUPID.

“‘Love! when I met her first, whose slave I am,
To make her mine why had I not thy flame?
Or else thy blindness not to see that day;
Or if I needs must look on her rare parts,
Love! why to wound her had I not thy darts?
Since I had not thy wings to fly away?’

How cruel well these lines fit one Norcot! But I would never fly. True love is patient—like charity it suffereth long; like hope it is eternal; like faith it keeps its course with the stars. Bless you! May the morning light restore you to health, and to the presence of your devoted Peter.

“Postscript:—

“‘If all the earthe were paper white,
And all the sea were incke,
'Twere not inough for me to write
As my poore hart doth thinke.—LYLY.’”

To this letter came no reply; but in the morning Grace appeared as usual and spent a reasonable portion of her time with the wool-stapler. For once Mr. Norcot tried an erotic vein, quoted the most passionate things he knew and attempted to warm a heart that—moonlike—ever turned one face to him. But it was the dark frozen side he saw.

“My ideas are boundless,” he said. “I spurn space on the day I call you my own. You were meant to mirror the Mediterranean in those wonderful eyes of yours, and you shall. We’ll sail away to the land of wine and song—to Provence, the cradle of the troubadours. It can be done now that we are friends with the French again. Yes; and I’m going also to take you to Italy; I——”

“At the beginning of the hunting season? How ridiculous you are, Peter. Why, even if I married you—which you know I never shall—I would not——”

“Grace, you must marry me. It is an accomplished fact. The banns have been read for the first time of asking at Widecombe and at Chagford. Nobody forbade ’em. You are absolutely vital to my peace of mind, to my well-being, to my sanity. You may not love me yet, but soon enough you’ll look back to these wayward days and mourn ’em.”

“Indeed I shall.”

"Mourn 'em, that you could so often have made so true a man sad. You won't understand me."

"Yes, I do—perfectly. If there is one thing about our dreadful relations that I do see clearly, it is your nature. You have been peculiarly and horribly clear of late. You want me—what you call 'me'—my curls, eyes, lips, and all the rest of a wretched girl. But you don't care a feather for the part of me that matters. You never consider that I've got a soul, and that it's always sad and sick and sorry when it thinks of you. You don't mind that you're killing all my higher senses and instincts—poisoning them; you——"

"Now, my dear Grace, these assumptions are nonsense, and show first how little you really know about me, and, secondly, how absurdly scant attention you pay to my conversation. It is a union of souls that I sigh for and shall assuredly establish when the time comes.

"Tell me not of your starrie eyes,
Your lips that seem on roses fed,
Your breasts, where Cupid tumbling lies
Nor sleeps for kissing of his bed—"

George Darley—a pretty boy-poet who has not published yet."

"Really, Peter, you're impossible!"

"I say tell me not of these things, Grace, because they are nothing whatever to me. I don't want to hear about 'em. Soul to soul—that's all I ask; and that is what I will have."

"Never! It takes two people to be married, and they've got to be of the same mind."

"Happily you are mistaken in that last assertion. Your idea is that one lover may take a maid to church, but the Bench of Bishops can't make her his wife if she's averse. Tut, tut! What a violent thought! We'll find ourselves of one mind yet. Greater things than matrimony have happened in less time than lies before us."

"Plain English is wasted upon you, Peter Norcot, and upon my father too."

"I'm much afraid you'll hear some exceedingly plain English yourself before long—from that same father. He grows singularly savage of an evening when you have retired. How clear lies your duty—why do you so shirk it? Is your conscience taking a

holiday? You know better than you speak—I'm positive you do."

Many such-like futile conversations passed between them; then befell the accident aforesaid. It placed some sensational information in the hands of Peter, and, little guessing at the result, he hesitated not to avail himself of it.

There came an afternoon when he sat with Maurice Malherb; while the master mentioned Grace and inquired how matters progressed in the affair of Peter's courtship.

"To tell you truth, a very retrograde business. I had done better to have copied your own unbending methods. But I'm a soft-hearted fool. What says the poet? Those writing men always know such a deal about it!

" 'He that will win this dame, must do
As Love does, when he bends his bow;
With one hand thrust the lady from,
And with the other pull her home!'"

"I'm amazed that any child of mine—but words only waste air now. The wedding day's at hand. She'll be the first to see her own folly when she looks back upon it. Obey she must and shall. To-morrow I purpose to have speech with her. Things have reached a climax. Heaven knows whence she got this sullen and mulish humour. Not from me."

"Nor from her mother, I'm very sure. Would she was more like your wonderful lady.

" 'Prudently simple, providently wary,
To the world a Martha and to heaven a Mary.'"

Annabel is a jewel among her sex."

"A wise man chooses his wife," said Malherb, "but it is denied him to choose his daughter. To-morrow, at any rate, we'll try and make the matter clear to her. I hate force. I am naturally a man of mild manners; yet this thick-headed world will never understand me until I clench my fist."

"One thing I must beg," interrupted Peter. "Don't surprise her. Don't suddenly appear before dear Grace. It would not be fair. I passed her chamber door yesterday, and by chance it stood ajar. She sat there busy with her needle; and the purpose to which she was putting it nearly startled me into an ejaculation. She does not know that I saw her. Candidly, I wish that I had

not done so. There are sad secrets—"She loves a black-hair'd man." In fact, there is somebody dearer to her than either you or I. What did I see? "Sight hateful—sight tormenting!" Stars and stripes—stars and stripes—but all stripes to me. I'll swear each one has left a bruise upon my soul!"

"What, in God's name, are you ranting about?" cried Malherb impatiently. "Is everybody going mad, or have I already become so?"

"You must ask Gracie that question. I saw her enfolded in a mass of red, white, and blue bunting. There is nothing in that. Bunting may stand for joy.

"The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the devil they got there."

And I wondered the more since these coloured rags were taking upon themselves the likeness of the United States national flag. Now, what is that notable emblem doing under this roof? I would not deny my future wife any rational amusement, but——"

Peter stopped, for Maurice Malherb had hurried from him.

The father strode straightway to his daughter's room, found the door locked and kicked it open with a crash, to see Grace sitting beside her window half hidden under billows of bunting.

In the year 1814, America's banner consisted of fifteen alternate red and white stripes with fifteen stars arranged in a circle on the blue canton. Helped by designs from Cecil Stark, Grace was carefully reproducing the historic standard upon a generous scale; and her father surprised her in the act to fit the last star into the circle. Upon one star was the word "Vermont," embroidered with white silk, and round about it ran a tiny margent of golden thread.

"What means this, woman?" roared Malherb.

"Why, that you've broken into my private chamber, dear father, and kicked the door down. And this—this, that I am making, is a flag of freedom for Mr. Cecil Stark and his friends. They hoped to hoist it above their Prison and rejoice at the sight of it on the Fourth of July—a very glorious day among them."

CHAPTER VI

UNDER LOCK AND KEY

NO man nor woman at Fox Tor Farm had ever witnessed an explosion of human passion so awful as shook Maurice Malherb upon his discovery. Annabel, in tears, confided to Peter Norcot that her husband had taken his daughter by the shoulders, shaken her nearly senseless, then flung her upon her bed. He had raged and roared until the house was a cave of harsh echoes; he had made fast his daughter's chamber door from the outside, and dared any living soul to approach the sinner without his permission.

"In the case of these tropical tempests," explained Peter, "nothing can be done. Happily they are short. 'In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire.' For my part, I return home immediately. Everybody here must get under shelter and wait for a change of wind."

"Argument is vain," said Annabel.

"Tut, tut! Who argues with a volcano? Write to me in a day or two; and have no fear for the dear girl. Half his rage now is because he so far lost his self-command as to shake her. A shaking after all—well, by my faith, she deserves it. To correspond with Cecil Stark! When I say that it was naughty, I understate the offence. However, that matter lies in a nutshell. Get rid of her messenger. John Lee's the man. Despatch him; and let him know that I'll befriend him. Farewell, until a brighter star shines over us, my dear Annabel."

Towards evening, when his wrath had somewhat abated, Mrs. Malherb told her husband of Norcot's departure—a fact he had not noticed for himself. She added particulars of his last advice; and before the moon rose John Lee had passed out of Fox Tor Farm for ever. With difficulty Beer and Kekewich withstood their master, for he had rushed among his people with a horsewhip.

"I was her servant, sir, to do her bidding," said Lee quietly; then he rose from his meal to depart. One ghastly blow he received across his face; and he clapped his hand to it and went out, while Kekewich interposed his stunted figure between Malherb and the groom.

"You've done enough for one day," he said without flinching. "Best to cool down, else your raging fires will set your brain on light and cast you into Bedlam."

"'Enough'! Is it enough that a man's daughter——?" began Malherb. Then he broke off and rolled his eyes upon their frightened faces until the pallid and rotund orb of Mr. Cockey's countenance challenged his glance.

"And you, tailor, work as you never worked yet! Let your trash be done next week, or take it back again."

He quitted the hall abruptly; and for the rest of that dire day his wife suffered him alone. Her prayers he cried down; her tears he dried by terror. He ordered her not to weep, and frightened her into obedience. She believed that he was going mad and suffered untold dismay until, cast up like a drowned thing by the waves of his passion, physical nature collapsed and Malherb slept. Groaning and moaning in the dream scenery begot of his wild spirit, she left him, crept to the prisoner and took Grace to her bosom.

For an hour they held mournful discourse, but Annabel did all the weeping. Her father's temper animated the girl and she panted with indignation.

"I weary of your tears, dearest mother," she said. "If you may fetch me some food I should be thankful for it. That smooth coward to peep into my room! And to tell! I will jump from my window on to the kind granite sooner than marry him!"

Annabel mourned her daughter's folly; she explained how that John Lee had been dismissed at a moment's notice; and then, changing her mood, she talked herself into quite another frame of mind, and began to upbraid the sinner with all her might.

"'Twas a very unmaidenly thing, and that much I stoutly tell you. To have an understanding with a man, and one who is your country's enemy! Your father has destroyed the flag. He thrust it into the red-hot peat and scorched his own hand badly. He raved against the very foundations of the earth when he burnt himself. Like Samson, he would have dragged down the

house if he could. Oh, you are a thorn, not a daughter! He is breaking his great heart. Treachery is beyond his understanding. I blush for you, Grace Malherb."

"I wish you would get me some food; I'm starving," said the girl wearily. "He would not grudge me bread and water."

"That is what he said just before he slept. 'Bread and water,' said he—then his voice grew softer on the brink of sleep, and he said, 'She may have milk too.'"

"I love him through it all!"

Mrs. Malherb's tears flowed again. She left her daughter and presently returned with the food.

"He didn't say 'twas not to be warmed, so I've heated it for you. Oh, my pretty, wicked sweet—how could you do a deed so unbecoming?"

"I don't know, mother," answered Grace, beginning to eat. "These things happen. I liked Mr. Cecil Stark very much, and I like his country and his ideas about right and wrong."

"A young man's ideas upon such subjects are usually very mistaken."

"In the third letter he wrote me he asked me to make a flag for him, and I consented after carefully weighing the matter in my mind."

"What should he want with a flag, poor soul?"

"'Twas for the Fourth of July—the Anniversary of their Independence. There—the bread and milk are gone. Good night, kind mother. I'm sorry you ever had a daughter."

"The female character has always been beyond me," confessed Mrs. Malherb. "The difference between a boy and a girl, as Peter once said, is the difference between a dog and a cat. A dog is so much more reasonable, so much easier to comprehend and direct. Slyness: 'tis a feline thing; and as to obedience, it certainly comes more natural to a son than a daughter, though I know not why. At any rate, it is so where a mother's concerned. A son will do anything so gladly for his mother—if you don't ask him to interfere with his own comfort. And what mother worthy of the name would do that? Not that disobedience to parents was ever recorded against either sex in our rank of society when I was a girl. Now good night, child. Try to sleep, and let your prayer be the same as mine—that it will please God to lift your dear father's wrath by morning."

But with the return of day Malherb still wasted his nervous energy in anger. He refused to see his daughter or to liberate her. He wandered miles upon the high Moors alone; then going back again, he returned to the infamous treatment he had suffered and the torment of possessing a thankless child. Presently he attacked his wife, and cursed her past folly and ignorance.

"You are to blame for all!" he said. "'Twas your upbringing—so weak, so fond—that bred this devil in her. Would to God you had more of my own mother's spirit in you. Look at me. I owe everything to my education. She was a Roman mother. Had you been more like her, this minx had never dared to flout a father. But, by God, I'll break her now or never!"

Within the day Malherb arrived at a determination; but he told his wife and Kekewich only. Then a letter reached Peter Norcot. The secret, however, leaked out, for Kekewich confided it to Mordecai Cockey, and Mr. Cockey uttered it aloud as a mournful fact in the hearing of Dinah Beer. That night Richard Beer naturally heard it; and then the news reached Harvey Woodman's ears. Finally it came to the intelligence of Tom Putt, and made his heart quicken by a stroke or two in the minute. For Putt had taken this matter much to heart.

"'Tis become a common prison, wi' that lovely miss locked up as if she's done a murder, 'stead of fall into love with a fine gentleman," grumbled Thomas. "For my part, I can't stand it very much longer. Ban't a manly thing for us chaps to bide here an' know a maiden's being starved to death on bread an' water under the same roof with us."

"Her done it underhand," said Woodman. "If it wasn't for that, I'd feel the same as you."

"Well she might do it underhand wi' a tiger for a parent."

"Best you pick your words, else you'll go after Jack Lee, wi' a flea in your ear," returned Woodman. "I say 'tis a very terrible proceeding," he continued. "An' seeing the chap's a Yankee, nought can be done. 'Tis an unthinkable thing for one of our bettermost young women to marry an American. I'm 'mazed she could give her mind to such a rash deed."

"That's because you haven't got more ideas than a cow," said Mary Woo'man firmly. "What's the matter with the man—Mr. Stark, I mean? God's goodness! You talk as if he was a

monkey, or some foreign savage as scalped people for his pleasure. He'm good to look at, an' he had a beautiful gentle way with him for all his fighting face. An' so straight as a fir tree a was, an' full of learning, an' civil to the least of us, an' gave you a golden half-sovereign afore he went away. So you'm a traitor to miscall him. I won't have no narrowness, Harvey, an' you well know it. You used to be so broad as Bible in your opinions, an' very charitable-minded for a common man. But to tell such things because a young gentleman be born out of England—I'm shamed for 'e!"

Woodman had little to say before this wifely rebuke. They all talked on and expressed their concern; but Thomas Putt did more than debate the situation and regret it. Despite lack of opinions on all matters save sporting, he had plenty of common sense and courage. He could act promptly, and danger or any consciousness of unlawfulness in a task usually stimulated him to successful achievement. On his own responsibility he took up the cause of the prisoner. While there was yet time, Grace Malherb must know the thing determined; so argued Putt; and in that conviction he took a definite step, and conveyed his information to another.

Then came a morning when Grace from her prison window witnessed the departure of Mr. Mordecai Cockey. She shivered as he went, for she knew that his work was done. Some six weeks yet remained before the day appointed for the marriage, and gloomily she speculated as to whether her father could find it in his heart to keep her thus shut up throughout the whole splendour of summer. Annabel visited her daughter thrice daily; but she brought little news and no comfort. Grace soon discovered that her gentle parent suffered much under weight of secrets. The mother felt often tempted to reveal what was now afoot; but she had promised her husband to say nothing.

"Mr. Cockey has gone off much earlier than it was proposed," said Grace upon the evening of the tailor's departure.

"He has done his work."

"And wasted much good cloth."

"I pray to Heaven that you will listen to reason when the time comes to do so, Grace."

"I shall never hear reason under this roof, mother. To think—a grown woman so treated! How can father heap such insult

upon his own flesh and blood? How he would have scorned any other man in the land who had treated a daughter so!"

"It has pleased God to perplex his noble nature; and he knows his own weaknesses. He has come near relenting more than once. But, like Pharaoh, he hardens his heart again. He suffers worse than you do. He has quite lost his appetite—a very alarming symptom, I think. At table he helps himself, as he helps everybody, with his usual generosity; then I see you come into his mind, and he fumes and frets and thrusts his meat from him. There is trouble, too, that I know not of. We are much straitened. I shall hear all about it some night, when he is in a soft mood."

"Nobody can help him—that's the cruel thing with dear father."

"He'll not listen to his kind. It is as though God had cursed him and said, 'Thou shalt trust no judgment but thine own.' So warin-hearted and so beyond reach of other men's wisdom as he is!"

"I trust in Heaven to bring him to his better self. There are yet many weeks before this dreary farce is ended," said Grace.

Mrs. Malherb looked exceeding guilty as her daughter uttered these words. She answered nothing and prepared to depart; but she hesitated at the door as though about to speak. Then she changed her mind and withdrew quickly.

Ere the morning's dawn, however, Grace heard the thing so studiously concealed from her. She slept but little at this period and busied her mind with futile thoughts. She did not doubt that John Lee and Stark knew all and were busy upon her behalf. Therefore, when a gentle tap fell on her casement an hour after midnight, she felt neither fear nor astonishment, but welcomed it as a thing expected. She struck a light to show that she had heard, wrapped a gown about her and came to the window.

A scrap of paper tied round a pebble lay on the sill, and upon the paper was written one word: "PULL." She obeyed and found that a thread communicated with the ground below. At the other end of this string was a length of whipcord, and when that also had been drawn up, she found that it brought after it the head of a slight rope-ladder. A further laconic direction appeared upon another scrap of paper: "MAKE FAST." Grace fixed the

ropes to the iron grate of her fireplace and extinguished the light for safety; then her heart beat fast as the cords strained and a man rose up from the darkness of the earth below.

Not until he was at the casement and she heard him whisper, did she know that it was John Lee. A wave of disappointment swept over her; and to hide any ray of it, she bent and kissed his hand.

"'Tis only me," he said; and his voice that read her heart so clear, cried to her to be honest with him and speak the thing she had longed yet feared to say.

"Dear, dear John. I wish I could say what you deserve to hear! You risk your life for me, for father would surely kill you if he knew of this. Yet what have I to give you back for such devotion? 'Tis no time for anything but solemn truth. I've long feared to face it, dear John; but now I'm grown older and braver. I will marry you, John, but I do not feel all that I thought I felt. I am not the true, trustful girl you think me, but a flighty fool who did not know her own mind. There—you know—and I'm thankful that you should know, though you must hate me and condemn me evermore."

"Think you this is news, my pretty Grace? How strange to hear these things retold after so many days! I'm long since schooled to this cold truth. Dear heart, your eyes never hid a secret—nor your soul! I know—I know everything—all that you feel—all the sorrow you've suffered for me—all that you cannot say—all—all—to the secret prayers you've prayed to Christ about it! Suffer no more. The man you love will soon be free to stand between you and trouble. And you'll never quite forget me neither—never forget me—I know that. I'm content; and I'm selfish too, you see. I've claimed one great payment—the right to rescue you, and the joy of it. 'Twill be his turn next. I'm saving you for him. You can trust me if he does?"

"Whom should we trust? We're both in prison now. 'Trust you'! faithful, generous John!"

"You must be so good as your word at once then. Your banns have been asked out thrice. To-day is Saturday; you are to be married on Monday. The date is changed. Putt brought me the news where I dwell now. I have returned to my grandmother. There's much to tell about what's doing at the War

Prison, and about him—Master Stark—but that must wait until you're safe."

"They have plotted to marry me—to dash me into it by a surprise?"

"They have."

"I'll stay and brave them!"

"No, no—what's one girl against two resolute and determined men? Terrible things happen—women have been drugged as maids and come to their senses wives. Don't pit yourself against them. Stark knows that you must escape."

She reflected a moment.

"If he wishes it—if you wish it—yes. But not now. To-morrow night, John."

"All's ready. Your parents shall learn that you are safe and well. But to find you will be beyond power of man. So that you can trust me——"

"To-morrow night, then, I'll be furnished for flight. To-morrow—kiss me, John."

"For him?"

"For yourself. Is not my life worth that? Yet 'tis poor payment for a poor thing."

"For the last time before God."

He bent over her and folded her in his arms. She felt his young heart against her own. Then he kissed her lips.

"Your lover no more; your slave for ever," he said.

A moment later he had descended to earth, and Grace shed tears for the first time since her imprisonment. She drew up the ladder as he directed, hid it close and watched John Lee vanish into the dim dawn. Then she turned into her room and felt already that it was a memory of the past—a nest of youthful joys and sorrows, of many a girlish fancy and old dead dream, now left behind for ever.

CHAPTER VII

THE TUNNEL GROWS

CECIL STARK and William Burnham walked side by side in their exercise yard and discussed the affairs of the world. While the American prisoners toiled like moles underground, great events marked the time. The Allies were in Paris; Napoleon had abdicated and, for a moment, the war with France was ended. The Peace of Paris had been accomplished, and Europe took breath. Yet liberty's glorious reveille woke the French at Prince Town to more grief than joy.

"I can find it in me to be truly sorry for them," said Stark. "They have starved and frozen and suffered for an ideal cause and the ideal is shattered. They trusted Bonaparte as our people trust God; and now the idol they adored is fallen, and the master they hate is lifted up again."

"Men from Plymouth presented them with their old national flag and advised them to wear the white cockade," answered Burnham; "but every mother's son of 'em sticks to the tricolour and has pinned the Bourbon favour to his dog!"

"They cry out that Elba is too small to hold the spirit of Napoleon. Perhaps they are right. Time will show that," said Stark.

"Their wives and children will soften their griefs when they get home."

"Doubtless. And their common sense, so soon as the first smart of failure is past. War teaches men to look twice into the claims of kings."

Burnham did not immediately reply. Then he said—

"I've noticed a change in you since that awful experience when Miller perished. You seem—forgive me—less patriotic-minded than of yore."

"I have wider interests than of yore. I get important private letters."

"From home?"

"No—from friends in this country. To be frank, I have no personal stake in life that I lacked until recently. We cannot live to the State only. We must also live to ourselves."

"Do those interests of self and State clash then?"

"As to that, my lad—why, mind your own business," replied Stark. His tone was amiable, but Burnham knew the subject could not be reopened.

Presently others joined them and conversation turned to the subterranean works.

A shaft, whose adit was carefully concealed, now sank upon the tunnel under Prison No. 6. The mouth was narrow, but within it space had been dug for four men to work abreast. A grand difficulty was the disposal of the excavated earth; and ingenious methods had been taken to get rid of it. A stream, which ran through each prison yard at the rate of four miles an hour, carried away many tons of fine dirt, while much was mixed with lime, plastered over the prison walls and then whitewashed. A large cavity discovered under Prison No. 5 proved also of great service, and many tons of surplus soil had been cast into it. Now, as their passage crept yard by yard nearer to the outer walls, the workers suffered for want of air; but means to eject the azotic gas were devised; a system of lighted lamps answered this purpose; and to Lovey Lee fell the task of smuggling large quantities of oil into the War Prison.

The leaders spoke with hope and enthusiasm. A week or less would see the completion of the tunnel, and already plans were being developed for the great exodus.

Burnham, fresh from his conversation with Stark, found David Leverett at his elbow; whereupon he discussed his recent rebuff with the sailor.

"Stark was wont to be open as daylight. But now there's a bitterness about the man, and his mind wanders. To-day he confessed to other interests than our common interests. And at such a critical time!"

"You can't trust any human in this world," said Leverett. "I tell you there's not a doodle inside these walls—narry a Yankee or Britisher— who hev'n't got his figure. Man's built so; so's

God. You can't even get into Heaven for nought. 'Tis a question of price. Only Hell lets you in free."

"You don't mean——?"

"I don't mean nothing. 'Tis dangerous ter mean anything in this place when you've always got unseen eyes watching you, like a hawk watches a sparrow. But let the highest amongst us be watched as well as the lowest—that's all. No treason in that. I hev'n't got any ill-will against Cecil Stark, though I know you was always jealous of him. He's a good boss, and I trust him as much as I trust anybody else. But liberty's sweeter than love of man or country; and money with liberty would tempt the angels I reckon, if they found themselves in this place. Money and liberty's all the world can give a man."

"What's money to him? He's made of money."

"So much the more might he want ter be free ter spend it. He's not the sort to stop home nights anyhow."

"For that matter, there's money for all since the French departed. Their offices fall to our men now. The prisoners are making fifty pounds a week or more—apart from home allowances."

"Yes, an that tarnal miser, Lovey Lee, pouches half of it," grumbled Leverett. "Talk about money! If I'm first through the rat-hole, I'd like ter get my four fingers on ter her windpipe and strangle her by inches. That's the payment she deserves!"

"We shall be through in four or five days. Knapps sends in word that since they got a recruit—Lovey Lee's grandson—their rate of progress has increased. 'Tis the letters that John Lee gets to Stark that make him so unrestful, I believe."

"Stark could give 'em the slip for that matter," said Leverett. "Scores of Yankees as can speak the lingo have given up the names of Frenchmen and gone out. I'd hev done it myself if I could parley-voo."

"Yes," admitted Burnham. "He's a good scholar. He could go to-morrow; but if he did he would be a coward and a knave. He knows that it is his duty to stop and see this thing through."

"Duty! Well, I haven't got much more use for duty myself," replied the other. "Life's short, and there's nobody on earth or in heaven cares for me but David Leverett."

"Stark happens to have bigger ideas than you," answered Burnham coldly.

"'Tis easy for the rich ter hev big ideas; but they ain't no good to the likes of you and me."

William Burnham resented these sentiments and turned on his heel; while Leverett addressed Mr. Cuffee, who passed at the moment, and, in default of a better listener, grumbled to him.

"Devil take the hot-heads; and Devil take the hindermost! 'Tis every man for himself in this world, so far as I've seen. And when all's done, and we're free—what? How's five thousand unarmed men ter get ter Tor Quay and take ship ter France? We want a fleet o' vessels! They'll send the sojers after us, and they'll lick up and overtake us and cut us ter ribbons—that's what they'll do. 'Twould be truest kindness ter stop the whole thing."

"Marse Stark he lead de way. He wiser den us."

"You think so—and the rest likewise. But I say this snarl is beyond his powers ter loose, and we're going the wrong way about it."

"You no blame Marse Stark?"

"I duz then. He ought ter know, if he's so tarnation wise, that it can't fall out right."

Sam Cuffee shook his head.

"If you fink Marse Stark ebber make a mistake in him life, you no fren' ob mine no more," he said.

Elsewhere the subject of these criticisms was fighting with mingled interests, and found himself torn in half between the prisoner at Fox Tor Farm and the prisoners at Prince Town. Escape was now easy enough for any intelligent man; and with each draft of French prisoners many Americans had got clear off by giving up the names of the dead; but in Stark's opinion, the fortunes of the plot were his fortunes. Daily the difficulties increased, and as larger numbers of prisoners became familiar with the secret, the chances of treachery grew. A week or less must see the tunnel bored; but meantime the temptation to desert his post was terrible. Through John Lee, Stark had learned of the catastrophe at Fox Tor Farm, and now understood that secret means were afoot greatly to hasten Grace's marriage with Peter Norcot. The American also knew clearly that, while a prisoner in body, Grace Malherb was free in heart, and that she loved him. His soul longed with a frantic desire to reach

her side and save her. By night he dreamed wild dreams of rescue; in sleep he saw himself conveying his love to France, wedding her there, and returning to England again that he might face her father's fury; but with day his obligations to his countrymen banished this picture. To desert the cause now was impossible, for his escape would awake sleeping authority and unsettle those he left behind him. Every hour new problems had to be met and solved. Rumours of disaffection reached him often. In this predicament he did not trust himself to think of what he might do, had it not been for the presence of John Lee. The vital matter of Grace's escape rested with John, and even now, as Stark tramped the prison yard, he scanned the grille, impatient to see his friend. For upon the preceding night Grace had been rescued from her home and now hid in Lee's safe keeping until Stark himself was free.

As for John, no personal hopes and ambitions longer remained in his mind. Never keen, they had waned utterly with his life's sole joy. Now he stood for nothing but the happiness of Grace Malherb, her safety and her welfare. She alone acted as an incentive and made his life continue to possess attraction. For her he entered into the plot of the Americans; for her he toiled beside James Knapps to hasten the ends of Cecil Stark; for her he now ran countless personal risks and came safely out of them, helped by his very indifference to danger.

Upon the day that was to have seen Grace married to the wool-stapler, Lee appeared among the spectators at the barriers, and pulled some small coins from his pocket as Stark approached with one or two trinkets of prison manufacture.

"All's well," he said shortly. "I brought her safely off. Even now Norcot must be cooling his heels at Widecombe Church; for when they discovered this morning that she had escaped 'em, there was no time to communicate with him."

"She is unhurt? No harm befell her?"

"To earth she came like a pretty dove, and by sun-up she was safe. She's not far off neither."

"To think of another doing these things that should have been my blessed privilege!"

"D'you grudge me that much?"

"No, no, Jack; but consider—her lover. Yes—I'm that now, thank God."

"This was what I could do for her and you could not. She is out of danger now, and will be for a week—not longer."

"In less time than that my work here is done and we shall be free," answered Stark. "Then 'tis my turn; then I must——"

"The tunnel will be through in less than four days—perhaps three," interrupted John. "Knapps works eighteen hours a day and I do my stint. He's made of iron. By night we get rid of the soil; by day we work while my grandmother keeps guard. When the time comes, we shall knock out the side of the cottage so that the open door shall be as large as possible."

With difficulty Stark brought his mind back to this great matter.

"She—yes—the exit must be as wide as you can make it. We are planning the final stroke. At best it will take some hours, however good our method and discipline. The danger of alarm is manifest—also the danger of false alarm and panic."

"You deserve to succeed. You have great authority over men."

"My obligations cease when I take my turn with my fellows and come through the tunnel. It is each man for himself then. But I have given my word to depart no other way. Then! How shall I pay you for all I owe you, Jack?"

"Name that no more. You cannot. She will pay me. Her future happiness is my payment."

"And her future will rest with me. 'Tis a solemn thought for one so little worthy of such a trust. Shall you see her to-day?"

"Every day until you are free and beside her."

"My purpose is to get to Dartmouth and hire a vessel that will take us to France. I have heard all about the place, and believe that a little ship can lie hid at some appointed spot where the trees hang over the river."

"Such spots abound. I might see to that. When once you and your countrymen are free, her hiding-place must be left instantly, for another will come to it."

A shadow of lover's jealousy clouded Stark's face; but it was gone in an instant.

"If we get successfully out of this, you and you only must be thanked for all. I lag behind you every way. But I'll do my share, Jack, when I get opportunity."

"No fear of that. To-morrow I may beg a mount at Holne and get to Dartmouth. But, to be frank, 'tis more vital that I should watch over her than do any other thing just now. If Norcot lays hands upon me, all may go wrong. He'll know right well that I've a hand in this."

"Then think first and only of her, and guard your own safety before everything, for her sake."

A mat of dyed grass and a little box of coloured wood passed between them, while Lee handed a coin back through the bars.

"Her letter is under a false bottom in the box," said Stark; then he turned to some friends and Lee went his way. In his mind was a great desire to visit Dartmouth and complete these secret plans. Yet the awful danger to Grace if misfortune overtook him and kept him from returning, made him hesitate to incur other risks than those already run.

CHAPTER VIII

HUE AND CRY

WHEN Thomas Putt reached Widecombe Church on the morning of the wedding, he found the company from Chagford had already arrived. Peter Norcot's bottle green coat, gilt buttons, and noble shirt frill, presented an imposing and attractive appearance; his sister Gertrude was attired in lace and silk of a faded lavender hue; his man Mason wore a mighty bouquet of flowers on his new livery. Last of this party was the bridegroom's cousin from Exeter—a young Clerk in Orders, one Relton Norcot, whose flat and somewhat vacant countenance grew pale as he heard the news. He feared the issue and expected an explosion, but his knowledge of Mr. Norcot was small.

When Putt announced that Grace Malherb had vanished in the night, Peter's eyes contracted a little: he rose from his seat, thrust his hands deep in his breeches pockets, and began to pace up and down in front of the altar rails, regardless of the whispering crowd in the church. His reverend cousin drew him to the vestry; then the disappointed lover spoke.

"I'm very little surprised. We must act with the utmost promptitude. She's not done this thing single-handed. I'll wager that groom John Lee's in this, and, like enough, Stark, too. He is the rascal for whom she suffered imprisonment."

Peter next turned to Putt.

"Tell us all you know," he said.

"Only that the window was open, your honour," answered Tom, who secretly prided himself on the entire conduct of the affair. "'Twas by the window Miss Grace went out. Her left a letter for her mother. They do say—Mrs. Beer I mean—that her wrote her'd rather die a thousand deaths than have you, begging your honour's pardon for mentioning it. She said as she was going to be in trusty hands also."

Peter nodded, while the young clergyman with the fatuous face began to get out of his surplice.

"She must have been very badly brought up," he remarked, and Norcot stared at his cousin; but his mind was on the matter in hand.

"I shall proceed instantly to Dartmouth," he said. "Tell Mason to saddle my horse and his own. Either from Dartmouth or Tor Quay they will endeavour to leave the country. Mark me, that man Stark has broke prison again. Is Mr. Malherb in communication with Prince Town?"

"Not that I knows about," answered Putt. "Master be like a bull of Bashan—to say it with all respect. He've made Fox Tor Farm shake to its roots. He's lamed two horses a'ready afore I started, an' he's been tearing over the Moor since dawn, like the Wild Hunter. He 'pears to think he's been hardly treated by Providence: an' he's called down fire from Heaven, by all accounts, on pretty near everybody as lives on Dartymoor. A proper tantara, I warn 'e! God knows how 'twill end. He roareth against all things but hisself."

"'Tis a shattering stroke," wept Miss Norcot, "and you are a marvel, Peter, to bear it with such composure."

"Tut, tut! Get you home, you and Reiton here. The marriage is postponed. See her home, Relton, and bide my coming. I may not be back for a day or two, but don't return to Exeter until you hear from me."

Then he again addressed Putt.

"Ride back at once and direct your master to set a sharp watch about Holne. They are lying close to-day; but they will doubtless try for the coast at nightfall. First ascertain if Mr. Stark has escaped again from the War Prison; next do all in your power to capture the person of that groom. I've a hundred pounds for the man who takes John Lee and keeps him fast. Now be off; and let them know that I will be at Fox Tor Farm by midnight or later."

His horse was waiting for him, and quite indifferent to the crowd that had assembled round it, Peter mounted, bade the children get out of his way, and galloped off with his man after him. The disappointed bridegroom purposed to inform the authorities and place patrols above Dartmouth, both upon the roads and river.

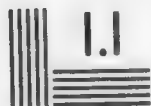


MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



1.0



1.1



1.25



1.4



1.6



2.0



2.2



2.5



2.8



3.2



3.6



4.0



4.5



5.0



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

As for Tom Putt, he rode home; while Miss Norcot and the clergyman returned to Chagford.

At Fox Tor Farm, as the day wore on, wild turmoil reigned, and the flock-master in fury was urging his exhausted labourers to further efforts. Every spot for miles around about was searched; the industrious Mark Bickford even tramped over Cater's Beam and through Hangman's Hollow; but Grace Malherb, securely hidden in Lovey's treasure-house, was beyond reach of discovery. John Lee had laid his plans with care, and knowing that his grandmother would stop at Prince Town until the completion of the tunnel and the liberation of the Americans, he selected her secret hiding-place for Grace. Here, until Lovey's next visit, she was safe; but the miser would soon herself be flying hither with her reward—before that moment Grace must be gone.

"When she does come," said Lee on the night of the rescue, "she'll bring some fat money-bags with her; and she'll have to lie low henceforth, for if they catch her——"

"And there's danger for you too?"

"None to name," he answered. "My fear is only for your health—that you may suffer in this dismal pit. It is damp. But here's a snug cubby-hole I've found—dry as a bone—and I've filled it with sweet dead fern and heath. The water that trickles yonder is pure. And upon that shelf, beside the money-bags, you'll find bread and bacon and a jug of cider. 'Twas all I could furnish yesterday, but I'll come back to-night with better fare. Here's a few candles too, and a flint and steel. And—and he'd be here now if he could—Master Stark—you know that right well; but he's got a great weight on his shoulders—five thousand fellow-men to answer for; and he knows you're safe while I draw breath."

"I can't thank you. Each word you say stabs me and makes me ashamed to live."

"Sleep—sleep soft and safe; and dream of him. 'Tis not going to be long before he comes to you; but it won't be here. To-morrow I see him; to-morrow night I'll return again. Don't fear for him. Think of the light he's got to show him his road! You're safe as sanctuary here. And remember, if time hangs heavy, that you may be within touching distance of the amphora."

She shook her head sadly.

"Father will never forgive me now. I have done a deed unpardonable. He cannot understand that I love him with all my heart, and yet deem my poor, wretched body a sacred thing—beyond his right to dispose of as he pleases. I only pray this will not drive him to distraction."

The man left her, and during that day had speech with Cecil Stark at the War Prison, as we have noted. He worked also for several hours beside James Knapps, and then, towards midnight, returned to Grace. So silently did he descend into her hiding-place that he did not waken her. She slept snug in the russet sweetness of last year's bracken, and the candle by her side made a play of great black shadows broken by the glow of the fern. Her young shape was sunk in this soft resting-place, and her lips shone very red in the candle-light. They held his eyes, since her own eyes—those lovely lamps that generally attracted a beholder—were hidden. Long he watched her peaceful breathing, and stood fired to his heart, unwilling to rouse her. Once she half awoke, and moved and lifted her head; then she cuddled into the fern, sighed softly and slept again.

Presently he called her in gentle tones, and she sat up, still dreaming; then came to her senses and remembered.

"Great news," he said. "First, here's some fresh wheaten cake and some butter and three hard-boiled eggs. Next, you must know that the tunnel is just finished. We were nearer by five or six yards than we thought. To-day we heard them knocking."

"How is it with my mother and father?"

"I have seen Putt within the last two hours. He stole out to Fox Tor and met me as I came. Your mother keeps calm, for she knows that you are safe; but Mr. Malherb is like one possessed."

"Alas, I can see him and hear him as though I was by."

"Men fear to come to him. There is a settled battle in him against every human soul. Yet a strange thing happened: at a lonely cot yesterday, where he called to learn if they had heard of you, a little girl stood by the door; and he looked at her, then suddenly caught her up and kissed her before he got on his horse again. The child was not feared at his fierceness neither, but laughed into his bloodshot eyes. The mother told Tom Putt."

"Oh, why was I your daughter?"

"Norcot went straight from Widecombe to Dartmouth, so Putt also tells. A deep man—how he hit the critical point—how he knew what was in our heads! He'll have watchers on all the boatable waters, and to-morrow he'll set to work to hunt himself."

"If he should find me, John!"

"Then I'll forgive him. Now farewell for a while. I shall see you again to-morrow night."

They parted, and Grace read the letter that John had brought her. Stark was deeply concerned at her escape; but he wrote not one word of love in this missive. She missed that word, yet knew well how much he had upon his hands and how that this was no time for softness.

And Lee, returning over the Moor, heard a horse's hoofs behind. He had scarcely dived into some old tin-streamer's workings and flung himself flat behind a furze-bush, when Peter Norcot went by in the dim tremor of dawn. So close was he that John saw his eyes were half shut, and that he nodded and nearly slept in his saddle. Light had broken eastward, and already the small life of the Moor stirred amid glimmering grass-blades.

Norcot jogged onward to Fox Tor Farm, and Lee, wondering whether the lover or himself had worked harder during the past day and night, got back to his grandmother's cottage at Prince Town.

Great bustle marked the farm when Peter reached it. Mrs. Malherb, haggard and careworn, greeted him where sleepy-eyed men and women were collected in the servants' hall. For a moment there was respite, because Malherb had already risen and ridden away. Norcot followed his kinswoman to her parlour, then sank into a chair and began to drag off his top-boots.

"Any news, Annabel? I see from your face that there is none. This mad business of keeping her chained up! It was bound to end thus."

"Maurice has started again—this time to Prince Town. Oh, Peter—his reason—I fear terribly for it! No human creature could endure what he has endured and keep sane. I assure him that she is safe on her own showing. I have it under her hand and seal. But he will not believe me or her. He is like the sea breaking on rocks—he never tires. After midnight he leapt up and was soon in the saddle again. He has gone to the War Prison now."

"He should have gone there first. Many hours have been lost."

"He will make trouble with Commandant Short, for he is in no mood to be denied."

"What news had he of Stark's escape?"

"We did not so much as know that the young man was escaped."

"I feel little doubt of it. However, he'll hardly clear Dartmouth, or Tor Quay either. Grace, Grace! Poor child—how true—Hesiod—Earth and Chaos are the parents of Love. Now I must lift myself out of this chair again! Fifteen hours in the saddle—three horses. Do for pity's sake get me a bumper of strong drink, Annabel. And my wedding breeches—worn out. Only just now off to the War Prison! Tut, tut! His rage has made him blind."

"He has been brave as a lion and done ten men's work."

"Ten fools' work, you mean. 'When valour preys on reason, it eats the sword it fights with.'"

"I fear, indeed, for his reason, and for his precious neck. He is worn out in mind and body, and ought to be in bed instead of on horseback."

"So ought I. Send the drink to my usual room, my dear. And bid them call me in three hours. Make 'em wake me whether I will or not in three hours' time."

"If my Maurice would but listen to sense!"

"Men don't change the habits of a lifetime at fifty. What does Cicero say? '*Utatur motu animi*——' I'm too sleepy to talk English, let alone Latin. 'He only uses passion who cannot use reason.' A very unreasonable man is Malherb."

"You shall not criticise him at such a pass, Peter. None shall. This wicked girl may cost him his life—you and she between you. No man ever led a more honourable and single-hearted existence. He is always trying to do right."

"Yes, I know all that. A man trying to do right is only interesting as long as he fails. Malherb has never yet ceased to interest me."

"Go sleep, cousin. You are saying things you would not say in your proper senses."

He rose with a groan and hobbled painfully to the door.

"Death and fury! I'm an old man myself this morning;

gone in the hams and gone in the head! How I ache! But wait until to-morrow. 'When Greeks joined Greeks, then was the tug of war.' We'll catch my gipsy to-morrow. Don't forget the beverage, Annabel. Half a pint of champagne and a little drop of brandy in it. A drink for heroes. And a hero I am, if ever there was one."

But
n was
forget
a little
I am,

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST THROUGH THE TUNNEL

MAURICE MALHERB, worn with futile rage and toil, now turned his face towards the War Prison, and cursed himself as he rode along, because he had left this vital business until now.

Dawn saw him far upon his way, and its grey light touched his grey face and revealed new marks of storm for ever stamped there. His cheeks were somewhat sunken; his life and energies seemed concentrated in his eyes. He sat heavy and inert upon his horse, yet sometimes spoke aloud. His eyes were never still. Their dark gaze ranged the desert, and nothing, near nor far, escaped his scrutiny in the murk of the dawn. The chill hour cooled his forehead and helped him to reflect.

"A man's daughter of all things living to turn upon him! And of all daughters mine! She who has lived long enough to see me in the right a thousand times. The only one left to me. And knowing the deep love I bear her! And knowing how that my judgment errs not. 'Tis beyond belief that we should bring out of our own blood a thing that can feel so little thankfulness for the blessing of worthy parentage. I grudged her nothing. I gratified her every wish from childhood. And the only one left to me! Oh, God, how comes it that a man's own offspring can show him so little of his own self? She should be my image and her mother's blended together. Yet what is she? An exemplar of all that is hateful in woman. And yet—and yet—when she was not crossed she could be as other maids—sweet and daughterly to those that doted upon her. She has made me think that I was all in all to her. But disobedience—to break from the control of her father. And to love an American! Fiends of hell, to love one of them! Madness—'tis some strain of erotic madness that turned her eyes

to this enemy. The love I've wasted there—and would again—and would again!"

His mind broke off, then returned to the matter.

"But no—never again. She shall be nothing now—I've cast her off; I have prayed to God that she may be dead—rather than——"

He yawned and his sleepy brain relaxed its grip upon his wrongs. Memory was worn out. He stopped once and actually asked himself upon what mission he rode thus in the dayspring hour along this solitary waste.

The morning star waned above the Prison and another dawn broke to the murmur of many waters. Light stole out of the thin sweet air; a rosy illumination washed the sky, tipped the towers and spread beneath his horse's feet. Prince Town stretched its granite rings before him; and some fairy tincture of light touched even those solemn walls. They glowed as the morning opened golden eyes, and the ascending sun arose from a pillow of fire.

The master rode straight to Ockery Bridge, where Captain Short's cottage stood; and upon his demand instantly to see the Commandant, a servant assured him that it was impossible. This he expected, and it did not suffice. Before the man could interpose, Malherb had pushed past him and entered the little dwelling. He shouted aloud for Captain Short, and was about to lift his voice again when the officer himself appeared. He was dressed in full uniform.

"They refused me, Short, but I would take no refusal. Matters of life and death may be afoot."

They were acquainted, and the soldier answered civilly.

"Good morrow to you. As for life and death—why, I believe it is as you say, though I pray the affair may end sans bloodshed. My patience is near gone, however. These men have the devil in them, but, luckily, there is always a traitor to reckon with. Cottrell also found it so."

"I am concerned about one man."

"Then your business can wait, my dear sir; for I am concerned about several thousands. You come at a momentous time. Look yonder. Within eight-and-forty hours my hive would have been empty and my bees swarming—God knows whither."

Commandant Short laboured under excessive emotion. He

THE FIRST THROUGH THE TUNNEL 273

was very red and excited. His hands continually failed him while he endeavoured to buckle on his sword.

"I desire to learn all you can tell me of Cecil Stark," said Malherb, "and know I must at once."

"In good time. What think you of a tunnel burrowed under those walis? They have done it—scraped a hole clean through! At midnight came a message for me, and in secret I received the news from one of themselves. Two hundred pounds and liberty was his reward."

"Not Stark! You do not say that he turned traitor?"

"The rascal's name cannot be divulged. But at least you shall see the sequel."

"Stark has escaped—I know it."

"Then you know more than I do. 'Tis a scheme almost wins my admiration. Yet I should have had little admiration to waste had they succeeded. Now I crush 'em—within this hour. All is perfected by their leading men—and by me."

"So much to your credit; but I must see Stark if he is yet there."

"It is not possible to have speech with him before my coup. Afterwards I may arrange for it. You shall come with me, if you please. To think that within two days my Yankee rats had all been away to the sea!"

The soldier's fervour grew. He had planned a dramatic answer to the plotters and now set about it. Malherb rode beside him to the War Prison; but first they visited the barracks, where a regiment of soldiers was drawn up under arms. One company immediately marched to the cottage of Lovey Lee outside the walls; the remainder proceeded with Commandant Short.

It was then that Sam Cuffee, while engaged in preparing his master's breakfast, caught sight of the troops, dropped a pot of coffee, and came flying to Stark with his news.

"Dey come, sar—de lobsters—tousands ob dem! And de officers an' Marse Commandant wid de plumes in him hat. Dey march straight off to No. 6. It am all ober wid us—we cotched sure—damn de debbil!"

Stark cried that discovery was impossible; but a moment later he saw the truth for himself. Many hundred half-dressed

Americans swarmed into the yards and a hedge of steel confronted them.

Captain Short stepped to the front of his forces, and a subaltern in a loud voice cried out certain names from a paper. He rehearsed correctly every member of the prisoners' committee. Stark, Burnham, Ira Anson, and the rest stood forward in turn as they were called.

"Follow me, gentlemen, if you please," said the Commandant; then, while a growl of rage went up from the assembled masses, Stark and the leaders, heavily guarded, were marched to the scene of their operations in Prison No. 6.

Short, who had been informed most punctually of this affair, marched straight up to the flagstones that concealed the descent to the tunnel. He bade two turnkeys raise the pavement, and then all marvelled to see the perfection of engineering work pursued under such difficulties.

"A notable feat! Accept my hearty congratulations," said the Commandant drily. "And when was this accomplished, good sirs?"

"It has taken many months, Captain," answered Cecil Stark. "'Twas finished but yesterday at midnight."

"I know that; one of your friends has thought better of the matter and sold you all."

"No true American," said Anson hotly; "I'll stake my life 'twas a renegade Britisher."

"No, no. Don't imagine that. He is one of yourselves. However, you'll not have any more to do with him. He has his reward. Now tell me—where in thunder did you dispose of the enormous quantities of soil you must have displaced in this business?"

"Ate it—to make up for short rations," shouted David Leverett.

"A good idea; but there will be no burrowing out of the cachots, my man. 'Woe to the vanquished' is the tune now. Away with them!" Then he added to the guard: "Let them be separately confined. I will question each man in turn later on. Now for their tunnel! You little thought, gentlemen, that I, your Commandant, would be the first through this ingenious exit!"

The soldiers separated. A company one hundred strong, with

loaded muskets, marched Cecil Stark and his companions to the cachots; while thrice that number of soldiers formed square and stood facing all ways about the pit mouth. Then Captain Short and two of his officers with lighted torches descended. Once there was an ugly rush of prisoners in the confined space above them; but the bayonets kept all back, and before any organised resistance or counter demonstration was possible, the Americans had been driven out of No. 6 and the doors locked against them.

Meantime, while Captain Short crept from end to end of the tunnel and presently thrust his head through the floor of Lovey Lee's empty cottage without the walls of the War Prison, Malherb had followed Stark and endeavoured to get speech with him. But an officer in charge knew nothing of the master of Fox Tor Farm, and ordered him back. Malherb made a rough retort, and the soldier promptly sent him out of the Prison precincts.

"I would serve you if in my power, sir," he said, "but to allow any speech with these men at present is out of the question. Get you gone, therefore, and impede us no more."

"You whipper-snapper—what know you of this? There are affairs of vital importance that demand my speech with that rascal. I will speak with him! Have I toiled through a century of suffering to be denied by a starveling subaltern? And the knave actually under my eyes! Speak with him I will, so stay me at your peril!"

He woke the echoes from many walls; he fumed with indignation that a youth should affront him thus; while the officer, ignorant of all that boiled in this man's mind, and conscious of the gravity of his own charge, made short work with Mr. Malherb. He called a sergeant.

"Take half a dozen men, Bradridge, and turn this lunatic out. If he won't go, rogue's-march him! We've enough on our hands without madmen to-day."

As though to confirm his assertion, a great uproar rent the air behind them—a clamour like the wind-driven sea breaking upon some mighty cliff. The nature of their disappointment had permeated through the prisons; and thousands of baffled captives cursed their fortune and threatened those dangers that lie in concerted action of desperate men.

Sergeant Bradridge obeyed the word of command, and, despite his impotent raving, Malherb was thrust forth by force. He called

down destruction upon the great fastness behind him ; he wished the Americans all free to overwhelm their guards ; and then, at the entrance, another company of soldiers appeared with two prisoners handcuffed together.

"Waal, I guess they'll be astonished—some of 'em—when they see me alive and hearty," said James Knapps to his companion. "Not many knew as I was snooking round t'other side that wall, and digging like hell day and night."

John Lee did not answer, for he had observed Maurice Malherb.

"I must speak to that man !" he cried to the soldiers. "For God's love do not deny me ! 'Tis like to be death for an innocent woman if I don't !"

"Not your grandmother—eh ?" asked Knapps, "I reythar reckon she can take care of herself."

John had now turned to Sergeant Bradridge, and earnestly addressed him. The sergeant was a local man—a native of Buckfastleigh, and the uncle of Mr. Putt.

"Sergeant," he said, "you know your nephew Tom : he's my friend, and I beg you to let me speak to Mr. Malherb there. It's a fearful thing if I'm denied."

Then he lifted his voice to his old master.

"I implore you, sir, to give heed. There's danger threatening Miss Grace—I alone——"

But the other turned and roared him down.

"You hound—you lying rascal ; you, that plotted to help this knave Stark ! Shall I hear a groom when I may not hear his master ? Take him away and shoot him for a traitor to his country !"

"Your daughter, sir !"

"Keep her off your lips, or I'll strangle you with my own hand," bellowed the other. "You're at the bottom of half this cursed business—I know it—I know everything !"

"Her life, I tell you——"

"Is not in your keeping. I'll not hearken to a word from you. Take the damned dog away and let him die as he deserves to die. My horse—my horse !"

Sergeant Bradridge addressed the raving man aside.

"If he's got aught to say, your honour, best hear it. You may not have another chance."

THE FIRST THROUGH THE TUNNEL 277

"Never! He has nothing to do with my daughter. Is she not a Malherb? Hang the lying, infamous scoundrel! Take him from my sight. Let all such be hanged. I would say it if he was my son!"

A moment later he rode away full charged with frenzy; while Lee and Knapps passed into the War Prison.

CHAPTER X

A GOD OF GLASS

IT had been Lovey Lee's part to keep guard during the operations beneath her cottage, and, on the morning of discovery, while Knapps was underground and John Lee lay in a heavy sleep, she stood at her door and scanned the morning. Her mind was on money; within eight-and-forty hours she would receive her reward; and now every glittering dewdrop of the dawn shone beneath her eyes like a gold piece. Then it was that another scintillation—that of steel—struck upon Lovey's sight, and she saw the flash of bayonets and the gleam of red coats. They approached swiftly across the Moor, and, divining their significance, the old woman instantly fled out at the rear of her cottage, and climbed and crept with amazing speed into the lonely fastnesses of North Hisworthy Tor above Prince Town. Here, safe as a fox in earth, she remained close hidden until nightfall, and then started for her holt at Hangman's Hollow. The fate of the men she had deserted troubled her not at all. To have informed them of danger would have been to lessen her own chance of escape by a full minute, and she had felt no temptation to take such risk. Now was all lost but her liberty; and as she stalked along the nocturnal Moor, like a dark and gigantic bird, the miser swore aloud and cursed fortune at every step. A live thing in the path reminded her that she had not eaten food for six-and-thirty hours; stooping, therefore, she picked up a luckless frog, tore it asunder, and stayed her stomach with its quivering hind legs. Never had Lovey fallen into a temper more ferocious and brutal. Months of patient fraud were thrown away, and she found herself actually out of pocket upon the venture. This reflection maddened her. In a delirium of dis-

appointment she strode forward, and once, when an owl screeched out of the coppice at Tor Royal, she screeched back at it like a fury, and swung her long arms, and cursed the stars because they looked like good money scattered and wasted upon the sky. She sank into a calenture of crazy wrath; frantically she longed for some object upon which to vent her mania of disappointed hope; and every moment she hastened unconsciously nearer a victim.

Grace Malherb grew weary of the long hours that separated her from John Lee's next visit. An eternity of time crawled by, and the very hands of her watch appeared to drag as she sat with it before her. Only once a sound fell on her ears through that protracted day. Then she heard a bell, the fall of many feet and the bleat of flocks. Soon the grazing sheep wandered away and silence fell again. The tinkle of the dropping water and the throb of her own heart were all her company. The gloom and the chill of her hiding-place crept to her bosom and froze the hope there. She fell to weaving fearful fancies; she pictured failure in a thousand shapes. The rusty and glimmering gold of the moss upon the walls grew hateful to her eyes. Yet it attracted them and held them, so that hour after hour she scanned the luminous cavern, and saw faces in it and read words scrawled in dull fire there, like the Handwriting on the Wall. She ate and drank a little, but her appetite failed her. All her emotions merged into intense longing for John Lee. Her watch told her that it was noon at last. Then she fought with herself to escape forebodings and set about occupying time with a search for the amphora. That treasure possessed none of the old fascination now; yet, thinking upon her father, she much desired for his sake to discover it, and made a diligent search both high and low. Her explorations revealed two other boxes tied with cords; and these she opened, only to find Sheffield plate in them.

An eternity of twelve more hours crawled by; then, when midnight had passed, Grace began to strain her ears for footsteps. It was a close, black night, with thunder in the air; but as yet no elemental murmur broke the stillness.

At three o'clock, worn out and full of foreboding, the girl crept to her fern bed and prayed long prayers. Finally she slept, soothed by a determination to fly from this hated hole in the

morning and hide elsewhere, if John Lee did not come. Her last waking thought turned to her father. "I will continue as firm as he is firm," she whispered to herself. "Would I had been different—for his sake ; but not for my own."

Within an hour she slumbered, and when Lovey Lee sank silently down into her den, the girl heard nothing. Grace was hidden within a deep alcove of the wall, and she slept without a light. The miser, once in safety, stood silent and listened. It was for a growl of thunder that she waited ; nor did she expect another sound. Heavy drops of rain began to fall, but as yet no storm awoke, though so inky was the east that dawn seemed delayed.

First Lovey ate a loaf of bread from her mouldering stores ; then she sat down by the stone table in the midst of the grotto, rested her head on her hand and considered the position. The future bristled with dangers and difficulties ; turning from it, therefore, she rose, lighted a candle and drew forth her treasures. The money she had not fingered for three weeks, and now she counted it, and the steady stream, sliding through her fingers, served to soothe her. Miser-like, she kept her supreme possession to the last, and before she brought it to the light, her mouth began to water and her eyes to glow. Though now crushed by an uncontrollable weight of weariness and sleep, she prayed to her glass god and performed his familiar rite before she slumbered. From the ground at the foot of her granite altar, the old woman scratched the soil, then drew forth a metal box. It clashed as she picked it up, and Grace waking at the sound, was just about to hasten forward when she heard the old woman's voice lifted to address her deity.

"Come to me, my purty blessing ! To think as I haven't had a sight of 'e for nigh a month ! An' the devil's luck fallen to me since I seed 'e !"

The girl shrank back and watched, breathless, while Lovey drew a mass of cotton wool from her box, and then, revealing the Malherb amphora, placed it reverently on her granite table and lighted other candles around it. Now she squatted down before the vase and remained motionless, like a toad watching a fly. Here was her support and power, the spring of her existence, her sustenance, and the foundation-stone of her life. She gazed and gazed with greedy eyes ; she licked her lips and

nodded slowly, like a china image. The amphora, against its gloomy background, flashed in the candle-glow. Its azure splendours shone in the cavern's darkness; the acanthus leaves were touched with flickering gold, and the Cupids seemed to move and peep about behind the foliage.

"Dance! dance, my naked boys!" said Lovey. "Though there's nought to dance about to-night. All lost—an' me a runaway! Where shall us go to next? Us can't live underground like a badger for ever. But I sold my cows a fortnight ago—that's somet! 3. Dance, you little devils; dance—dance!"

She gloated upon her treasure and trembled with joy of possession. Presently she put out her hand gently, like a cat touching a dazed mouse. Then the fit grew upon her. With each hand in turn she stroked the amphora and twisted it round and round. Anon she lifted it and brought it close to her face; she kissed it and cuddled it against her breast, and rubbed her cheeks upon it and slavered it, as might a fond mother lust over her child. Grace Malherb heard a harsh vibration, like a tiger purring.

"I've got you, my heart an' liver an' reins! I've got you, come what may, my lovely joanie! And the day I die, you'll die too; for I'll grind you to powder an' eat you—fat babbies an' all!"

She laughed and nuzzled the glass, crooned to it and licked it. Then her frenzy waned; she set the treasure gently down and fell back exhausted. Her passion cooled; her eyes went out, like extinguished lamps; she shrank as she sat there; and soon she began to whine again before the thought of her losses.

"Christ! what a cursed day! What——"

A sudden sound struck her silent. Grace had moved and loosened a fragment of stone. The noise, though slight enough, reached Lovey's ear. She snatched up a candle and, hastening into the recesses of the cavern, came face to face with her visitor.

Amazement so absolute overwhelmed the miser at this discovery, that for a space it smothered every other emotion. She glared speechless, then fell back and at last spoke.

"God's word! Be I drunk or dreaming? Are you alive, or dead an' prying here a ghost from the grave? If you'm dead I don't care a button for 'e! An' if you'm alive——"

"I'm quite alive, Lovey Lee," said Grace without flinching before the ancient's terrific face.

"Alive, be you? Then 'tis the last minute you shall live to say you'm alive! How did you get here? Tell me, or I'll kill you by inches—a finger to a time!"

"I've done you no harm, Lovey. And I'll thank you to speak more quietly. There are men hunting for me on the Moor, and I've no wish for them to find me," said Grace firmly. As yet no fear had touched her heart.

"Find you! They'll not find you! God A'mighty won't find you. You'm dead a'ready!"

"I'm not dead at all; and I'm not going to die. If you'd listen, instead of screaming at me, I might tell you why I am here, and how I came here."

Lovey put the candle on a ledge above their heads; then she sat upon the fern couch that her grandson had spread for Grace.

"Get you up on your feet and stand afore me!" she said. "I'm mistress here—not you. Death! to think as ever I should allow any human but myself in this pit. Tell me truth how you found it—else I'll strangle you."

"The truth is easily told; and you shall pay dearly for these insults yet, you wicked woman! It was meant to marry me to Peter Norcot; and your grandson helped me to escape from that fate. John is always on the side of the weak. I owe my salvation to him. I am waiting for him now."

"Jack Lee found out then! Blast—but I needn't waste no words there. His thread's spun. So you runned from your faither an' that man? You might so soon think to trick Satan as Norcot. But I'll trick him. He can't marry dead bones. An' yet—there's money to it. Only I be so tight placed myself."

"That candle-flame will crack the Malherb amphora, Lovey Lee, if you don't move it," said Grace.

The woman sprang up and extinguished a dip that flamed too near her treasure.

"There's the answer to my doubts. You know too much now. I'll never sleep in peace no more while you are alive. There's a dead dog in yon corner—shrivelled to bones an' leather. He'd lost hisself 'pon the Moor and followed me here. I carried it down the steps, for it stood and barked outside. But I never

carried it up again. None leaves this web but me, come in who may. You can choose how you'll go out o' life—an' that's all the mercy I'll show 'e, Grace Malherb. You can starve, or you can kill yourself, or I can do it for 'e; but die you shall—sure as I'm a woman."

The girl regarded her steadily, and measured her huge body, long arms and broad chest. She knew that in a physical struggle she must quickly have the life crushed out of her, and for the first time she feared. Then she wondered if Lovey's heart was inflexible, and whether a way to bend her will might not exist.

"Is there no humanity in you—you who have been a mother?"

"No more than a mother wolf—not for you. I was a grandmother, too, wasn't I? I brought Jack up from childhood—an' he spied upon me. He'd have robbed me next—maybe he has."

"Not of a farthing."

"You've met me in a black hour. All's lost to the Prison. Some Judas have told the secret; an' as for me, I dare not show myself to the daylight. So there's nought to be made out of you."

"You might trust me."

"Not since you've seen that."

Lovey pointed to the amphora.

"My father rates me higher than a bit of old glass."

"You'm daft to think so! Why for should he care a cuss for you? More like he hates you, for you'm no daughter worth naming to him—a froward, man-loving minx, as plays fast an' loose with them he hates, an' defies him. Love the likes of you better'n fifteen thousand pound! He'm not all fool."

Thunder suddenly broke overhead, and subterranean echoes in the grotto answered it. The noise punctuated Lovey's speech and appeared to affirm her purpose.

"Die you shall," she said. "God do so to me if I don't mean it."

"I know you mean it now," answered the girl. "And, since everything is lost at the Prison, I care not very much about living. Yet, after all, 'tis only a passing reverse; therefore, I plead to live. Life is life. Somehow this choking hole makes me long to live. I hate your money and your treasures. I hate the gold in your bags as much as I hate the moss on these walls

that mocks it. I want to breathe sweet air and see the sky again. I'll keep your secret. Don't kill me, Lovey. 'Twill ruin your own life if you do."

"Life's worth living, as you say. For all my cares and years and cruel disappointments, I like it. But you—hearken to the thunder—I knowed 'twas brewing—you know too much. Let it rage! I wish 'twould drown Short's cottage, an' him in it, an' the Prison, an' the prisoners, an' the sojers, an' every living thing. You know too much an' I won't take your word."

"You're worn out and frantic. Sleep upon it."

The old woman reflected.

"So I will, then," she said. "Never heard better counsel. But you—you must sleep too——"

She came forward slowly, like some feline thing that stalks its living food; then she lifted her hands to Grace's throat.

The girl did not flinch, and Lovey dropped her great fingers again.

"You'm Malherb, I see—but I lay your heart's beating to a merry tune! Let it beat—its beating be near done. Them steady brown eyes too! I'll blind them, if you please, afore I put my little god there to bed again. No, I won't kill you this minute. I'll sleep on it. If you don't mean money from your wool-stapler, I never counted money. An' Norcot wouldn't give a poor, old, harmless granny up to the soldiers. Too much of the milk o' human kindness in him for that. What's his figure, I wonder? I must have a big one, an' my safety along with it."

She hunted her stores, found the boxes, removed their cords from them and approached Grace. "Here's a rope's end for 'e! No, not for your neck—for your heels. I must sleep—my senses are all addled—I can't think clear. An' you must watch—so no harm befalls me. Ha-ha-ha! us'll bind they neat limbs an' little ankles a thought tight, just to keep you from slumbering. 'Twas a pretty young Yankee's arms you counted to have round 'e, not a bit o' biting oakum!"

She made Grace fast with unnecessary severity. Then, tearing a strip from the girl's dress, she bandaged her prisoner's eyes. Next Lovey extinguished all lights and, in the blank darkness that followed, restored the amphora to its wrappings, placed it within the metal box and put the box underground. Then soil and stones were heaped over it, after which the

woman threw herself down on the earth above her treasure and quickly fell into heavy sleep.

The thunder roared, and through her bandages Grace was conscious of lightning. The glare of the sky penetrated some chance chinks above and found her. Close at hand she heard Lovey snoring. The ropes began to burn as though red hot, and each minute the torment grew. The storm died slowly, and she missed its companionship when it was gone. She envied the cattle that roamed free above her; she prayed fervently; but physical pain continually distracted her devotion. After two hours the agony became sharper than she could endure, and at the risk of angering her conqueror, Grace cried out sharply and woke Lovey from slumber.

The miser was up in an instant, her senses alert and her frame refreshed. She struck flint on steel and turned to the prisoner.

"Morning light," she said. "And how be you fairing, my pretty maid?"

"I am suffering very terribly, Lovey. I could endure no more without crying out. These ropes are gnawing into me as though they were alive and had teeth."

"Bah! You'm more fretted for your raw wrists and ankles than for them poor, brave fools to Prison as meant to save 'e! Bide as you be an' smart on a while. Your good time be coming —when you go to church with Peter Norcot. Now I shall set out to get a bellyful o' fresh air an' see to the weather. No human foot will tread Hangman's Hollow for a week after the flood us had last night. But don't you fear. You chose sure hiding! I shall soon be back. An' if the rope hurts, just think if 'twas round your neck instead of your leg!"

The old savage sought her stores; and then she discovered the bread and meat and eggs that Lee had brought for Grace.

"My jimmery! This was what made Jack so hungry of late! Well, us will have bit an' sup when I come back. I must keep you fat and plump for Mr. Peter now. Afore sun's up I'll be here again. Me an' the sun ban't like to be friends no more this many a day. For that matter moon's always more kindly to me."

"Will you, at least, loose my eyes? I promise you faithfully I'll make no attempt to escape while you are away."

Lovey laughed and took the bandage from Grace's face.

"Since there's nought to see but the gold moss you hate, look about so much as you please; an' as for escaping—I'll give 'e full leave to do it if you can. A horse couldn't break that rope, let alone a slip of a girl."

Lovey now climbed carefully out of her treasure house and Grace saw one blessed gleam of blue daylight before the great stone above was swung back into its place and Mrs. Lee tramped away.

CHAPTER XI

APOCALYPSE

NOW were the threads of three lives to be tangled by Fate upon the vast bosom of Cater's Beam; and here, within the secret morasses beneath that great hill, walked Maurice Malherb under the dawn and tempest. He ranged with the thunderbolt, for the storm had called him from his bed; the elemental chaos echoed his own heart and drew him forth into it.

He suffered such misery as only men built in his great, futile pattern are called to suffer. The calculating and responsible find themselves in no such sea of troubles; for their flotillas hold inshore; their sapient eyes ever scan the weather of life, and their ready hands trim sail to it. But this faulty fool with his mad temper and sanguine trust in self, had listened to none, marked no sign, heeded no warning. He had played the greatest game that he knew, in hope that an unborn babe might some day bless his name and perpetuate it. He had staked all and lost all. His daughter was driven from him; his wife, in the agony of her bereavement, had shed bitter tears, and, for the first time in her life, lifted up her voice against his judgment. His plans had miscarried; his money was nearly all lost. He stood under the storm bankrupt of everything that he had worked for and hoped for. He felt naked when he thought of his life, now stripped so bare; for every interest was torn out of it, and, as a tree robbed of leaves, it threatened to perish. Present tribulations thundered on his heart as the storm upon his ears. His soul felt deafened and bewildered; therefore he ran for shelter into the past. Time rolled back for him and he saw the tortuous journey of his days stretching into childhood. The vernal, sweet delights of youth appeared again, and he remembered old forgotten springtimes—birds' eggs—minnows—his first pony—the scent of the new-mown hay. Then his own disposition developed

and darkened the hour. Puberty was past ; freedom became his and he abused it. Manhood plunged him into gloomy and sombre avenues of years, lighted only by the flashing flame points of his own temper. He marked how ungoverned wrath had at last grown ungovernable, and had risen, time out of mind, like a demon, between him and wisdom ; how his own action had ceaselessly turned him out of the proper road, had clouded justice and threatened honour. He clung to honour as a drowning man to a straw. He fought the cruel white light of truth and strove to shut his eyes to it : for soaked in that blinding ray, honour stood no longer undefiled. A canker grew there ; a blot dimmed it : and the spectacle, shattering self-respect, hurt him worse than loss of friends and fortune and his only child. Cowardice and high honour could not chime together ; and light showed him that the canker-growth spelt cowardice. He had outraged the freedom of his daughter ; he had used force against her liberty ; he had denied her sacred rights in the disposal of her own life and body.

Before this thought he came to his better self through his worst. He called down a curse on the forces that played with his convictions ; he damned the inner voice of reason that showed him what he had deemed duty was an interested crime. Standing beneath the storm he put bitter facts behind him for vain phantoms, and maligned the awful ray of truth. Then, moody and sick in spirit, he leapt suddenly to sweeter and cleaner thinking. Some phase of mind, some physical conjunction, or some psychic crisis pervious to the influence of Nature, lifted him, as often happened, into great longing for the better part. The dawn showed him what no dawn had ever yet revealed. He turned to the East and prayed to it.

"Before Heaven I mourn for what I am ! I see myself cursed—self-cursed. Oh, God, give me back my child again, and I will be a wiser man ! Only my child—only my Grace. I humble myself. Punish me, great God, but not by taking her—my only one. I repent ; I will mend my life if I may but have my child again."

The sun, struggling above wild new-born day and dying tempest, answered his petition with shafts of flame, and wrapped that desolate wilderness in a mingled splendour of mist and fire. The pageant of the sky uttered a music proper to the man's sore

spirit, and unrolled with solemn glory. Heaven glowed and burnt, or frowned and shuddered in black precipices of storm-cloud that sank upon the West. Into the deep senses of the watcher these things penetrated graciously. They touched the ragged wounds of his heart and helped to heal them, while a harmony, as of music, fell upon his helpless, hopeless soul. All the wonder of the sky filled Malherb's dark eyes as he lifted them; but a light greater than the sky or any inspiration born of day shone out. Upon the verge of apocalypse he stood; yet gulfs unseen separated him from it. His days were not accomplished; his darkest hour was not yet come.

Now, where a rock rose at a point not far distant, there appeared Lovey Lee. She stood like some night-spirit, surprised by dawn, blinking and disarmed in the unfamiliar sunshine. For a moment she hesitated at the sight of Malherb; then approached him, conscious of her complete power. This man, and perhaps only this man in the world, was impotent against her. Not a finger could he lift. Harm done to her must bring far worse upon himself. Her wits planned a cunning lie and she advanced to utter it.

"You'm stirring early, Maurice Malherb. 'Tis strange that you an' me should both choose to walk this here ill-wisht heath all rotten wi' bog and water."

"I came to seek peace—not you. I ask you to quit my sight without more words. There is no anger in me now."

"'Peace'! Do 'e find peace in your own company? I'll swear you never have, nor never will. No peace for the likes of you till you be dead. Come, let's talk secrets—shall us? I've got things you'd dearly like to hear about."

"Leave me," he said. "I've done with cursing and swearing. There is much upon my mind. I will not be angry with you. My daughter is lost."

"They say you drove her away with a whip."

"They lie! 'Twas her own damnable folly that drove her away."

"Maybe you lie too, to say it. You've held me in such contempt and scorn—you've treated me so vile—that it's good, even at a time like this, to make you bleed a bit. An' I'm going to now. You shall cringe yet, though I have got the gallows hanging over me; you shall grovel yet, though I do stand an out-

lawed, doomed woman for helping them at the Prison. I'll crack your heart first; then I'll ax you to save me from the soldiers. And yet I doubt if t'other ban't a more solid man to trust—Norcot I mean. Anyway, he's a wiser one, and can pay better, too."

"Do you dare to mean that you know where Grace Malherb is hidden?"

"Ah! that wakes you up—you that have done wi' cursing an' swearing—you that stole my grazing rights and called me 'hag' and 'miser'! I've got your fortune in my hand still, for all your bluster and great oaths. And I've got your daughter, too! Now you can listen—eh? Now I don't worrit you no more? Yes, I've got her hard an' fast, wi' cords biting at her wrists an' ankles like poisonous snakes—she said it felt so. I told you I'd wreck your stupid, brawling fool's life; an' I have. You owe every pang you suffer to yourself—then to me; every curse you utter hops back to roost on your own head—so grey it grows with their droppings! My work—all mine! Now howl an' roar—I want to hear you!"

The man preserved an astounding self-control before Lovey's confession.

"This is what her grandson tried to tell me yesterday, and I would not listen," he said aloud.

"Ah!—you was ever a poor listener. More poison for 'e! He was your nephew—Jack Lee—the son of your younger brother, an' so like him as peas in a pod! He knowed, but you wouldn't heed him. But you always heed me, Malherb—doan't 'e?"

Still he spoke no angry word, though his great chest rose and his face grew dark.

"If you tell me the truth—that my daughter is alive and in your keeping—that is well. Much has happened since she went away. If she knew, she would be glad to come back to me. I—I am not faultless—I have erred. My eyes are opened. Give me back my daughter, woman—I will reward you."

"Give her back! When was I ever knowed to give aught to anybody? That's your own fool's way—give—give—give. I might sell her; but you've not enough money to buy her. I'd rather kill her by inches under your nose an' see you wriggle an' rave till them black veins on your brow burst!"

His passion began to beat up strong and tempestuous under her lash. The spiritual dawn-light was still-born. Storm awoke in

his soul before this infernal provocation and the sea of his mind fell into its accustomed waves before the wind of wrath. He forgot the danger of passion now; he did not appreciate the importance of self-control. His voice rose to the familiar roar and he clutched his riding-stock.

"What a loathsome reptile can a woman be! No man would descend to such filthy degradation. To treat you like a fellow-creature is vain; you are a beast, and must feel like a beast, and understand like a beast. Force at least you recognise, then see force here figured in me! Disobey at your peril, for I'll not stand upon words with you again. Get before me to my daughter! Instantly lead the way. Deny me, and I'll destroy you and rid the world of a venomous fury who has lived too long."

She did not guess that he intended actual and instant violence, but supposed he threatened to give her up to the authorities.

"Lies—lies!" she answered, mocking him. "You kill me? I know better. You're not mad every way. Do your own errands—I spit at you! I wasn't born to obey a fool. The hills and rivers laugh to see you dance an' blow, as if you'd got poison in your vitals. Never—never again shall you see her; never, not for millions! To give me up! Bah! how's that going to help? An' I'd laugh to think of her starving alongside fifteen thousand pounds. How black you get! Why don't you use that great horn handle you're waving about like a lunatic? Come, there's only white hair on my head, an' little of that. Smash my skull in! And then? Kill me. Ha, ha!——"

For the first time in her life, Lovey Lee mistook the nature of a man. That there was a sort of anger capable of rising high above its own interest her own cautious nature could not guess. She saw that the whole of Malherb's earthly desires were in her hand; and that he, who also realised this, would, with one mad stroke, rob himself of his last hope, she never imagined even as a possibility. Had he kept his reason, she had never succeeded in goading him to this murder pitch; but now he grew insane, and the woman paid forfeit.

She intended to show him the folly of threats. But the words were never uttered; her laugh was not finished. Beside himself, the master leapt forward; his whip shrieked across the air, and the massive handle dropped like a hammer on the miser's crown. To her knees she came, without a sound; next she fell prone

before him. Her legs and arms shot forth convulsively twice; a patch of blood swelled on her sun-bonnet, then soaked through and ran. One groan came with it and only one. After that she was still, and Malherb knew she was dead.

He turned away and lifted his eyes and saw the golden reefs and rosy cloud-islands of that wonderful dawn. Still the pomp and glory of sunrise filled the sky, for only minutes had passed since he stared upwards and prayed and uttered promises. He marvelled that so much could happen in such a brief compass of time. He mused of this experience and of his former hatred of a psalmist's curse. He had rebelled against that awful petition as being the demon's plea, beyond a good God's power to grant. Yet the thing had happened to himself in this hour: his prayer was turned into sin.

And then he hid himself within the hollow and lonely antres of the land. From dawn till dusk he tramped the desert beyond man's sight, and called on darkness to inspire him. Once without set purpose, he returned within sight of the spot where Lovey Lee had fallen. She lay there just as he had struck her down; and there she would lie until the carrion crows scattered her bones. His crime was safe enough from discovery unless it pleased him to reveal it. The deed he gradually grasped: its consequence still evaded his mind; but as he worked backwards in thought he came to Grace. Then he stood still before the vision of her perchance perishing of starvation. He was doubly a murderer; and, to escape that awful imputation, he told himself that the dead woman had lied to torture him; that her tales concerning his amphora were as untrue as the things that she had asserted concerning his child. He strove to find comfort in the thought that her life had stood forfeit to the State; then sophistry faded from him and a man, at best but little versed in the force of speech, stood dumb before a terrific truth. Murder overtook him and stuck to his side like a ponderable, shadow-casting shape. Far away he knew that foxes were creeping at the dim edge of dusk and barking of what they had found. First an aversion from any thought of a human face crowded upon him; then as the stars began to shine, he found himself craving hungrily for the companionship of man. He sat and rested for a while; he drank and watched a young moon in a green sky. The heath rolled here in deep billows, unfretted by

stock or stone. As it held unshed waters, so it could suck up darkness; and already detail was dying out of it ere twilight fell. He rose and walked onwards, careless of direction, into a chaos of marsh and broken peat hillocks. His mind worked quicker while his body moved; it stagnated into a slough of sheer blood when he sat still. Deep longing to see a fellow-creature held him; and suddenly, though he was got beyond the power of astonishment, a thing astonishing happened, and he found another man. It was improbable that two human beings had met in this shunned spot for years; perhaps no foot of man had trodden it since some storm-lost miner wandered that way when Elizabeth was queen.

Here now Malherb chanced upon one who sat motionless on a bank with his feet in the mire. He turned as the other approached, but showed no interest at sight of him.

"What lonely soul art thou?" cried Malherb; and as he spoke he remembered that for the first time in his life he heard a murderer's voice.

The figure revealed a strange countenance, made stranger still by suffering.

"No man me—just a skinful of hell-fire burning itself out! Get gone, for I poison the air around me. I never want ter see no human more."

The speaker's awful despair had power to arrest one, himself despairing. Malherb came nearer, and sought confidence. His crime had shaken his nature and unsettled the tenour of his disposition as a drug unsettles human organs. Now he thirsted to talk.

"You can rail so loud and confess so much! And yet here I stand; and to my misery yours, be it what it may, is the short grief of a child to a man's abiding woe."

"Lordy, what ~~his~~ words! You to prattle about trouble, stranger—ter me—ter me—a man who's touched bottom deeper than any man since Judas hanged himself. Away you and sorrow that can bear speech! Leave me ter burn."

An opal light from the West was in the speaker's eyes, and they glittered green. Their dreadful expression held Malherb, for agony far beyond the fear of death looked out of them. The sufferer's head was bare and nearly bald; his face was hatchet-shaped and narrow; the yellow skin seemed drawn to bursting

over his high cheek-bones : and upon his chin was a fan-shaped and grizzled beard.

"I perceive you are an American—a lonely wretch who might carry all his cursed country's crimes and sorrows on his own forehead. Yet what are national troubles to a man's own? You sit gazing and glaring. What then have you done that makes such a night of life for you?"

"A thing Satan's self never did—a thing as would heat hell again if 'twere cold—a thing not yet writ against any starving rag-tail on God's earth. Past hope—past praying for. And it seemed nought until it were done; but after—it's brought me ter this. Tell me you who talk as if you knew big trouble, why did it seem nought till afterwards?"

"What have you done?"

"It seemed nought till afterwards, I tell you. 'Then it grew up into a mountain. The fallen angels will be took back ter heaven sooner than me. Prayer's vain beyond a certain pass. Has life showed you that?"

"It has. Yet what is there in your torture that can make me unbosom mine?"

"Because 'tis the first longing that comes after crimes—to tell 'em," said the American. "So you've prayed too?" he added.

"I prayed? Yes, I've prayed hard and earnestly. I've frightened my horse by night as I suddenly challenged my God. I have dismounted and fallen upon my knees by lonely roads and secret places. I've bruised my soul and cried aloud to the Almighty and bade Him touch my fiend's temper and give me a clean heart."

"Never had no truck with Heaven myself. Kinder knew I'd have no use for it."

"Heaven—Heaven—you talk of Heaven! Another heart—a humble heart was all the heaven I wanted. To be at peace with myself—to learn patience : that was my unanswered prayer. And now the deed I have done has made me mad. Mad must I be, since I can talk of it to you. Yet 'tis to the thing looking out of you—not to you—I speak."

David Leverett stared into the dark face above him, and his starved, hollow countenance grew hard.

"What a trumpet! Ter bleat because you've got a nasty temper! What full-grown baby are you, that thinks God's its

nurse, and cries becuz it's lost Him! Look at me! Like the rest of men, you've lived ter find your puny misery capped by worse. But look at me! Christ's weat! you're an angel of light beside of me! A short temper——"

"That has driven me into murder."

"Murder—what's that? David was a murderer. So was scores that have marble stuck up to 'em all over the earth. 'Tis worse ter bring life inter the world than put it out. Have you never larned that much? You make a man in a moment of passion, and set another puppet strutting ter suffer life. And you mar a man in a passion, and—well, journey's end is no evil; death's no evil ter them that die. There's thousands of men this day as would tear me to pieces, limb by limb, and reckon they did heaven and hell both a service. And so they would. Curse the man as got me; curse the woman as bore me: not nim who would kill me."

"All this is nothing; you are only mad," said Malherb.

"Nothing at all! See here now—this great bag of leather. I've dragged it thus far—further I won't. That is what I'm damned for; that is why hell's gathering up heat for me."

He dragged out a big knife; opened it with his teeth; then fell upon the bag and slashed the leather. A flash answered every stroke, and gold coin tumbled and twinkled and fell in a shower upon the ground.

"Murder—if I could murder that; if I could cut the throat of what that bag means! But I can't—so I'll cut my own. It seemed nought in the planning and promising—nought till after I'd done it and felt the weight of the money here—here."

He beat at his chest.

"Murder—killing kittens! I've murdered a whole country—murdered America! For this filth here mixing with the mire—for this and for liberty! Whoever you are, help me ter curse liberty! The name of a thing that is not Judas only betrayed one man. A little matter that, come to think on it. I betrayed my own flesh and blood—them that had wives and children yonder, and old, fond mothers. Sold the whole of 'em—every blessed monkey of 'em; played God and Fate—for two hundred pound—and liberty!

"I sold men who had shared their all with me—who had spared the coats off their backs when I was sick, the food for

their stomachs when I was hungry. They trusted me with their secrets. I was a sailor—I'd had a hand shot away for my country. God tell why my head wasn't shot away! And first I betrayed my own true friends and hoarded the money, and felt no smart from that. And next I sneaked upon a nation. They took me along with the rest and put me in the cachot, that none might guess and turn and kill me. Then, when night came, they thrust me out—me and my money and my liberty! And out of the thunder came what I suffer now. Tell me why I didn't see the punishment sooner and escape it? Tell me why the money looked different till 'twas mine? And tell me what's left for me?"

"There's death for you and for me," said Malherb.

"That's the same as hell. Just judge! Then take my knife. You that fear ter let blood—let more. You was sent ter do it. Then you'll be forgiven, and your damned tender conscience will prune its feathers and pipe up again. Kill me. Let me get the worst of hell over; for thoughts of things are worse than any things themselves can be. I hoped the lightning would do it; but 'twouldn't foul its blade with me. I thought a great red-eyed bull would do it, and stood in his path; but he knew, and turned out of the road; he wouldn't red his horn with me."

"You see yourself," said Malherb solemnly, "even as I see myself—too late. You are the second who has asked me to kill them since the sun rose. The first I took at her word, and she is dead."

"A woman! One less to breed men."

"There may be repentance for you, if you can endure life till memory grows blunt. For me there can be nothing but increasing horror at my crime. Nothing can save me now."

"I reckon we have done the worse that was in our nature ter do," said the American. "That's nought—so have many and slept no worse. The scourge is that we've been made ter feel it."

"You are right; we feel; therefore we suffer. Farewell," answered Maurice Malherb.

Leverett did not reply, and the other passed out of his sight. One man plunged onward, never resting, never halting; one sat like a stone with his chin resting on his palm and his handless arm hanging beside him. The light of the stars was reflected on the knife at his feet; and presently a glitter caught his eye; whereupon he stooped and picked up the blade.

CHAPTER XII

THE VOICE

IN the past—from a standpoint of fixed opinions and no experience—Maurice Malherb had condemned suicide and pronounced the action improper under any circumstances. But now, in the light of that day's deed, it seemed that suicide opened the sole road which led from ignominy and disgrace immeasurable. He had forfeited his life. His exhausted body cried out for food and rest; but his mind was active, and chaos, untouched by the light of any star, raged there. He stayed his steps, sat down amid old ruins and brooded upon death.

His purpose slowly established itself, and he determined to depart in such a manner that no man should know of his going or gaze upon his corpse. He might perish in the tenantless wastes westward of the Beam, and feed vermin, and make the wild asphodel sweeter, as his victim would; or he might choose some forgotten cavern or deserted mine where ready graves yawned to hide dead things until doom. He knew of such places, and recollected a natural chamber hard by Dartmeet. Here in the woods lay a deep hole that ran underground, and was known as the Pixies' Holt. He determined to creep thither, as old dying foxes did, that he might perish in peace.

Then it was that, rising again and stumbling forward, in doubt whether his strength would last to take him to his goal, a voice reached him and Malherb heard a faint cry for succour. At first he thought it but a late lamb that had lost its mother's warm side and bleated for cold. Then the sound became articulate, and, forgetting his own circumstances, he listened very intently. Presently he shouted with all his might, and from under the earth came instant answer.

"Help me—help me! Come back to me, Lovey, or I shall die!"

Then were the man's ears opened, and he heard his daughter's voice. She was buried alive and at hand, for he stood in Hangman's Hollow. Now Malherb forgot everything but his girl.

"'Tis I, Grace—your father! Be of good cheer. I'm close—I'm close!"

He rushed hither and thither, bruising himself against the broken walls. Then he entered the *cul-de-sac*, and stood, and cried out again.

"Where are you now? How shall I come at you?"

"I am here beneath you, dear father! There is a great stone—part of the floor where you stand. It reaches to the left-hand wall. Stamp every way, and when you stamp upon the inner edge the stone will turn slowly and show you a steep stair."

She heard him grope about and stamp as she directed. Then he struck the cover and it turned, and showed him steps that sank into the darkness. Slowly he let himself down, and soon stood at the bottom with a starry space of sky above and the glimmer of the moss around him.

"Move gently towards me," cried Grace. "A flat stone lies between us, with flint and steel and candles upon it."

The master obeyed, soon lighted a dip on Lovey Lee's altar, then hurried where his girl lay fast bound. Malherb released her and she fainted. He chafed her blue, swollen wrists and, for the first time, thought of the dead miser without a pang.

Grace slowly regained her senses, but not her courage. She clung to her father and wept and prayed him for the love of God not to loose her hand from between his own.

"Save me—save me from her," she said. "Let me die anywhere but here—not smothered and starved here. Never let me see her and hear her voice again, or I shall go mad."

"You are safe, my little child. Cry no more; tremble no more; 'tis your own father has found you."

"My own dear father! My own dear father has saved me. I called and called and counted the falling drops of water. Sometimes I screamed when the ropes bit sharpest. But I called after every hundred drops had fallen. Then I heard a step——"

She fainted again, and, seeking for the dropping water that she mentioned, Malherb found bread and meat where John Lee had placed it.

He restored his daughter's consciousness, then made her eat and drink. After she had done so he finished the remainder of the food, and marvelled at himself that his appetite was keen.

"Come," he said, "now, with my hand to help, your strength will lift you out of this den for ever."

Anon they reached the air.

"A century has gone over my head since dawn," he said.

The girl took deep inhalations and looked at the sky.

"To see the dear stars again! Speak to me, father—speak and hold my hand. I have come to fear silence. Have you forgiven—can you forgive me for all the suffering I have brought?"

He held her hand and pressed it, but did not answer.

Slowly they moved away: then Grace stopped.

"Return, father—you must return and cover the mouth of the place, and make it fast against her. Else, when she comes again herself, thinking to find me dead, and finds me vanished, she will fly and take the amphora too."

"It is there, then?"

"Yes, indeed! I have seen it with my own eyes. She kissed it—her hideous lips kissed it! Then she hid it again."

"She will kiss it no more. She will not come back. The amphora and you—both in one moment! And I had determined to — The irony of God! A banquet He spreads—but my teeth are gone. Yesterday this would have turned me into a good man; to-day it is too late. Lean on my arm, little heart. I'm strong enough to hold you up still."

They spoke again of the past, and Grace told her father what he had already learned: that John Lee was his brother's son. He heard the fact with indifference now.

So they passed painfully and slowly to their home, and in an hour Grace was upon her mother's bosom.

With wine came strength, and the suffering of her raw wrists was quickly lessened. She sank to sleep holding Annabel's hand; and when she was in easy slumber, the wife returned to her husband. He was sitting below beside a fire of peat, and he also slept heavily. She loosened his collar, and, though the touch was light as down, her hand at his throat awoke him. He leapt to his feet and cried out aloud and bade her stand back.

"I meant to ease you," she said.

Then he awoke and took her in his arms.

"Forgive me. I dreamed an evil dream. Come, gentle nurse; I know that she sleeps, else you would not have left her. And you are heavy-eyed with much prayer and thanksgiving to God. How well I guess what's filled your heart since I brought her home! Now, wife, you may rest in peace."

"Come you too," she answered. "And have not you also thanked the watching God? Surely I know that you have."

CHAPTER XIII

PETER TRIUMPHANT

PETER NORCOT had left Fox Tor Farm the night before Grace's discovery and return. Upon hearing this great news, he wrote a magnanimous letter of forgiveness, congratulation and quotation; but he did not follow it himself for the space of three days. Then the richer by information of very significant character, he reappeared at the dwelling of the Malherbs.

Meantime the sorry truth had come to Grace. Cecil Stark and the leaders of the conspiracy at Prince Town were all suffering imprisonment in the cachots; John Lee was at Plymouth; Lovey Lee had vanished. These things she comprehended and mourned; her mother's grief at temporal troubles she also shared and understood; only her father had changed in every respect, and she could find little explanation for his actions. The crisis of his affairs approached, and yet he made no effort to avert it; once only she spoke to him concerning the amphora; but he desired her to leave the subject, and commanded her neither to return to her former prison nor mention the matter to anybody.

"The affair is in my hands," he said; "I pray you, Grace, to leave it there for the present. Utter no word upon this subject. I have reasons strong enough for desiring silence."

She promised, bewildered to think why her father could thus desert his treasure now that she had restored it to him; then Norcot arrived without invitation to spend a day or two.

He quickly perceived that mighty changes marked the situation. His first intention had been to let the past alone; but, finding that Maurice Malherb was indifferent to it, and would not so much as express regret at all the indignity Peter had suffered, the lover, for the first time in his relations with his future father-in-law, struck a firmer note and permitted some flash of that steel in him to catch the other's eye.

They rode together upon the land, and the subject was opened by Peter.

"You'll guess that I'm not here just now for rest and change, Malherb. There's a good deal to be said between us. But you seem indisposed to say it. Naturally I should like to know all about this wonderful rescue. Yet, since you are so taciturn, I'll leave that until it pleases you or Grace to tell the story. Suffice it that she's alive and well, and I hope wise at last. Now, how do we stand?"

Malherb noted the difference of tone, but made no comment upon it.

"She and I stand in the relation of father and daughter," he answered. "That is not new; and yet it is new. I have learned a good deal of late. My judgment is shaken within me."

"Where the judgment's weak, the prejudice is strong.' You talk as if you had been in fault, instead of your daughter."

"You were not wont to speak so to me."

"Nor you to act so. Life is short, and even my astounding patience has run out."

"Listen," said Malherb, reining up his horse and lifting his hand. "Trouble has fallen upon me—terrible trouble. You shall know—everybody shall know; but not yet. It is in Job—set there in the awful words of Scripture: 'He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death.' I have done evil, Norcot; I have fallen as I pray you may never fall. Invisible powers have rent me and torn me. I tell you that I have been through dark waters."

"Bless my soul! all the deities in a rumpus over one man! Tut, tut! What then? If you've learned some wisdom—if you've found out that God is jealous and takes mighty good care none of us shall be wiser than He is—then there's hope for you."

"I have learned much. This girl—my girl—she has suffered a great deal. Frankly, we have overlooked her rights."

"What moonshine do you talk, my dear Malherb?"

The other's eyes flashed—then dulled. His rage was but a shadow of its old self, and, like a shadow, vanished. He answered listlessly.

"I am not what I was. I have heavy anxieties, and I will not fight with my child. My opinion is changed. She is a woman."

"Little force suffices to break what's cracked already.' You

mean that she has prevailed with you to forswear yourself—to turn traitor to me. You a traitor! 'Tis a thing impossible!"

"What is impossible? No depth of error is impossible to one who knows not himself. To upbraid me is vain. The solid earth has shifted under my feet, Peter Norcot. But 'traitor'—I'll not brook that. Worse than that I may be, but not that."

"Not that, indeed! If you only knew how I respect you and approve your staunch, fearless outlook upon life! But I, too, have endured not a little. Think of it—the marriage broken off at the altar rails! And then fifteen hours in the saddle. Nocturnal adventures to fill a volume. Terrific expenditure—wear and tear to body and soul and clothes.

"And winged lovelings round my aching heart
Still flutter, flutter—never to depart."

"You cannot go back on your oath, Malherb. If you did, you wouldn't be Malherb."

"We are fighting against nature."

"We are fighting against Cecil Stark, not nature at all.

"Man's life is but a cheating game
At cards, and Fortune plays the same,
Packing a queen up with a knave—"

as Bancroft so appositely remarks. But the knave of hearts is hard and fast in a Prince Town cachot and like to stop there; and the knave of clubs—so to call that meddling rascal, John Lee—has stood his trial at Plymouth. They are done with; and King Peter shall come to his own queen again. I'm patient as a spider and sure as time. I'm going to marry Grace Malherb, though the heavens fall. I never change; but you? Am I more steadfast than the man who taught me steadfastness?

"An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven:
Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?"

Ask yourself that question."

"Let it rest awhile. I have much else on my mind—far greater things even than this marriage. There are heavy secrets—heavy secrets."

"Who has not got 'em? God knows how well I wish you. But to behold you weak! 'Tis like believing that you see granite, only to find it painted paper."

The other man's mind was running on.

"I want no son of the next generation to be my glory and my hope. I want no son, nor daughter neither. I weary of the future; I turn from it; I have no longer any wish that my name should outlive me."

"Why then, the case is clear: you're ill! How blind one can be! Somehow I'd never associated your iron constitution with physical griefs. Yet you, too, can be sick. Your vitality is lowered; I see it in your face. At such times there is danger of cancers, declines and murrains. They fix their dreadful fangs in us when we are enervated and weak. Man! trust me more. I'm no wind-bag. I can do things. I have many very definite deeds to my credit. Often I came to you for advice; now take from me what's better; coin of the realm. Forgive bluntness and accept blunt. This has nought to do with Grace at all. 'I will not purchase hope with ready money.' There's no room for false pride between us, thank God! I say you shall! I hate to see you troubled over the trashy aspect of human life. To be cornered for a little metal! Consider:

" 'Friendship! mysterious cement of the soul,
Sweet'ner of life! and solder of society!'

Blair. But what is friendship if we do not permit it to take shape or substance?"

The older man was touched instantly and deeply. He bent from his saddle and shook Peter's hand.

"You've a great, generous soul, Norcot," he said. "I thank you with my heart, but not with words. You don't guess what manner of man you would befriend. Yet thank you a thousand times. No, no—such things have happened that I would starve sooner than accept a loan. And you—if you knew—as you must know—you would desire Grace no more. I am growing old, Peter. Age surprises such men as I am—age and crime. Yes, I say 'crime.' But age creeps with calmer men. Upon me he has sprung. I'm not so wise as people have been good enough to think. But I'm going to pay for that. I'm going to pay for everything."

"Leave your affairs for the present. We'll return to them. You must see a physician. Meanwhile I insist on your taking five thousand pounds. 'Tis pure friendship, and so I hope you'll hold it. Now Grace—well, she is a woman. You said that not

long since. I was struck with the remark. Now, being a woman, she cannot possibly know her own mind. Trite but true. It is only fair that I should make a final appeal—only fair to both of us. Something leads me to think that she may yet see the true and proper course.

“ ‘Hope, heaven-born cherub, still appears,
Howe’er misfortune seem to lower.

See! she comes out to meet us! It is an augury! How lovely she looks, despite her trying experiences. Ride you off, Malherb; but hear me promise ere you go that I’ll not distress her.”

“Better that you should leave us all and forget us all, Peter Norcot.”

“Ride on, I say, and let the maid come with me. This business shall be ended for ever, before time for tea-drinking.”

Grace approached, and Peter waved his hat with customary politeness. Malherb turned away and galloped off; then the girl, dismayed, was about to follow him, when she found Norcot already at her side.

“Don’t go!” he said. “’Twas your father’s wish that we should speak in private together. Have no fear. ’Tis but a simple matter to do with the future, not the past. But we’ll get within doors, so please you. I hate talking of anything important from the back of a horse. I believe in transmigration of souls, you see. Who knows what spirit inhabits your gallant ‘Cæsar’?”

Without answer Grace turned homeward, and ere long she sat in the dining-room of Fox Tor Farm, while Peter stood before her and twirled his seals.

“Your father has explained facts, my dear. He is very unwell, and his judgment has left him with his health. He’s haunted by something. I hope drugs will lay the ghost. Now you—I begged for the boon of a little talk. Tut, tut! ’tis beginning all over again—and that after the banns were called for the third and last time! Poor cousin Relton—how he squinted when Tom Putt brought the news of your retreat!”

“‘To begin again!’ Oh, Peter, have I not made my answer clear?”

“No; because your actions were not clear. They were very mysterious actions. For two pins I was going to rescue you from your father myself. But I had a suspicion that even if I brought

wings you wouldn't wear 'em. Really, Grace, you've wickedly wronged a good man, though I say it. You've hurt me through and through."

"And what of all that you have made me suffer?"

"You haven't suffered. You've merely enjoyed an extremely exciting experience. Mentally you have not endured anything to name. No woman can suffer acutely so long as she's interested in three men. I say 'three.' 'Twas John Lee helped you to escape and risked his life and ruined his fortune for you. First, how do you stand towards that romantic young fellow now? 'Tis rather important—for him. To be frank, his life is in your hands. The law of the land has dealt with him finally; but the book of John Lee's days lies with you to shut or open at will. Have you forgot him, or do you desire to? That hardly sounds like another offer of marriage, does it? Yet I'm proposing with all my heart."

"Forget John! Forget him—forget to love him? Never. He saved my life."

"Indeed! All these delightful incidents are still hidden from me. But the question now is his life—happily not yours. You've doubtless heard that he helped that formidable skeleton, his grandmother, to dig a tunnel under the walls of the War Prison. Maybe he did it as much for you as anybody—to assist the young hero No. 2—Stark of the 'Stars and Stripes.' Well, call it what you like, 'twas high treason and poor John Lee must hang for it. I heard sentence of death pronounced at Plymouth yesterday—a solemn experience."

"John Lee—John!"

The girl reeled backwards, then started to her feet.

"He must be saved; he shall be saved. I cannot live if he dies. The guards—the soldiers. There must be some among them who would—oh, God, help me now! He must be saved if I tramp to the King myself!"

"Bravely spoken!"

"God and a soldier all people adore
In time of war—but not before."

Better leave the King out and trust to God and a soldier. And we'll set the soldier first, since pounds get answered quicker than prayers. There's no time to pray when the gibbet's up."

"He must be saved."

"He shall be—if I can save him. He shall be saved, though the price should be my wool factory. But this is a proposal of marriage—don't forget that."

"He must be saved."

Norcot nodded.

"So be it. 'I'll dare all heat but that in Gracie's eyes.' I may add that I'm probably the only man in Devonshire who could save him. And even I must do it by foul means, not fair ones. Say the word then!"

"I implore you, if ever you loved me. Oh, if I could do it myself I would not ask you."

"You can't do it."

"Then do you."

"And afterwards? Tut, tut! I may dance on the gallows I rob of him! One doesn't risk these highly coloured possibilities for a hand-shake. What afterwards, Grace?"

As she answered, Mr. Kekewich entered at the other end of the chamber, and he heard her reply.

"If you save John Lee's life, I'll marry you."

"Before Heaven you mean it?"

"Before Heaven."

"There's my brave heroine!"

"Tea is served in the drawing-room, Miss Grace," said Kekewich.

CHAPTER XIV

STRATEGY

WHEN approaching a problem Peter Norcot rarely made any error in his point of attack. By nightfall upon the day of Grace's promise he had left Fox Tor Farm, and only she knew the reason. But to Plymouth Peter did not go. He returned home, visited his safe and took from it the sum of one thousand pounds in notes. Any appeal to authority on behalf of John Lee must be vain. He had been sentenced to death for high treason, and four days separated him from the gallows. Norcot knew that the man would be hanged at Exeter, and that he was to leave Plymouth for that city under a military escort two days after his trial. He had learned the route of march and the constitution of the company responsible for the prisoner's safe custody. The journey would take two days, and the half-way house stood near Ashburton. A non-commissioned officer commanded, and upon that man Peter Norcot centred his hopes. Quarters for the company were already taken at Westover Farm, outside Ashburton: and here the wool-stapler designed to appear in good time. During the hours of that night he doubted little but that he would achieve his purpose.

Meanwhile a lesser man—one Thomas Putt—commands undivided attention. When Kekewich returned to the servants' hall after announcing tea to Grace and her lover, he found Mrs. Beer there. To them entered Tom with a fine salmon; but no voice of approval rewarded his achievement, for Kekewich was full of the tragic thing he had just heard.

"What a light it do throw!" cried Dinah Beer. "Poor tibby lamb; an' the hunger of that dreadful wolf for her! Now he'll get Lee off—see if he don't—though he's got to ax King George."

"If Lee knowed the price, I'm thinking as 'twould be more

than Norcot could do to free him," said Kekewich. "I was for this marriage heart an' soul, so much as master ; but he've changed since she runned away ; an' so have I. I'm generally of his mind in secret, though I never tell the man so."

"'Tis too dreadful to think of," declared Dinah. "Poor dear Jack !—yet the price of his getting off be dreadful too."

"'Twill kill her to marry him—honest gentleman though he be," said Kekewich. "An' she'll do it. If Mr. Norcot gets Lee off, she'll take him without another murmur."

Then Tom Putt spoke. He knew a great deal about the matter of Lee, for he had been permitted to see John at Prince Town and had afterwards got a message to him, through Sergeant Bradridge, that Grace Malherb was safe. To the sergeant fell Lee's custody, and Putt knew that on the morrow his uncle Septimus Bradridge would convey John from Plymouth a day's march to Westover Farm.

Apart from any question concerning Grace, Tom had already determined to see his old companion once again, and he knew exactly where the soldiers would make their noontide halt upon the following morning. Now his mind quickened and he showed a spark of the genius that had so often been wasted in successful poaching on Dart. First Mr. Putt begged Kekewich to give him a few moments of private conversation, and then, when he and the old man were closeted together, John Lee's friend explained a part of his purpose.

"My uncle's a fierce warrior, but he've always showed a great liking for me, and I know he'll not stand between me and a word or two with Jack. The day's journey is to be broken where Dean Burn flows down out o' the woods between Buckfastleigh and Dean Prior. 'Tis a spot where two roads meet, and there's a bridge there. Now I can get to that place afore they do : an' if I have speech with Jack Lee, 'twill put iron into his will."

"You might see Norcot?"

"I shall not. Norcot will tackle my Uncle Septimus to-morrow night at Westover. An' he'll find my uncle's a man as wants a tidy mort o' money to go behind his duty. As to Norcot, he'll get Lee off, sure's fate ; for Jack would run like any other chap to save his neck. But not if he knowed what price Norcot be getting for saving him. The gentleman may override Sergeant Bradridge, but he won't override Jack Lee."

"You'll want a bit of money, won't 'e, to get leave to talk to him?"

"Ess, I shall," said Putt. "That's what I wanted to say. A pound will go a long way with a common sojer, but not with my uncle. I wouldn't dare for to offer him small money. I shall just ax if I may speak to an old friend afore he's choked off; and I shall offer all you can let me have, an' hope for my mother's sake as Uncle Septimus will let me get a few private words."

"I can give 'e twenty pounds," said Kekewich, "an' that's every penny I've got by me. Money's scarce just now."

Putt nodded gloomily, because the elder touched a thorny subject. For the first time since Fox Tor Farm was built, had the master of it asked his men upon pay day to let their wages stand over for a week.

"I've not got a farden. Gived my maid to Chagford every penny," confessed Mr. Putt.

The old man nodded and produced his cash in the shape of two notes.

"I won't ax you your plans, Thomas, for you wasn't born yesterday. 'Tis a great source of strength that Sergeant Bradridge is your relation. Be witty about it; an' if John Lee can save her by taking his bad fortune like a man—well, so much the better, though 'tis a poor come along of it for him, poor chap."

Tom pouched the money carefully, but made no comment on the other's words.

"I'll take my uncle this here fish I've catched," he said, "for he's a man fond of pretty eating, and was brought up on Dart salmon. And I shall leave at cock-light to-morrow morning."

"Good luck go with you. Ban't often I wish anybody that; but this time I will for the maiden's sake. An' her good fortune will be his bad, poor blid! unless 'tis good fortune to die in a good cause."

"Us never knows what'll happen," declared Putt. "An' whether or no, 'tis bad fortune to be hanged, for it stops a man's usefulness."

The conversation ended with this just reflection, and very early next morning Thomas went his way. Mrs. Beer provided him with plentiful supplies of food and, upon his own account, he visited the tool-shed and work-loft before setting out. With him

he carried a stout stick, and his salmon as a gift for Sergeant Bradridge.

He struck into Dean Woods while it was yet early, then called at a farm hard by, where he was known, partook of a pint of beer and had some conversation with the farmer's son. Presently, seated with this lad in front of a load of manure, Putt jogged onwards and proceeded to a cross-road not far distant from Robin Herrick's old home at Dean Prior. Here ran Dean Burn from its fountains on Dartmoor; and to Mr. Putt this stream, now in full torrent after rain, offered interesting problems. He examined the waters with a professional eye, and his friend upon the cart laughed at him.

"Ever thinking of fish; even at such a time as this!"

"No, by Gor!" answered Tom. "I'm just wondering how shallow it runs to the bridge yonder. Lend me your whip an' I'll find out."

He proved to his satisfaction that there was deep water at hand, and then, while still in earnest conversation with the young farmer, Thomas heard a tramp of feet and saw the troops advancing. Thereupon his friend drew his cart and its burden into a side path by the stream, and Putt, with the salmon well displayed, advanced to meet Sergeant Bradridge. The halt sounded as he approached. The troops grounded their arms and, weary and hungry after a march of fifteen miles, pulled food from their knapsacks and scattered in comfort by the grassy way. For drink, the river rolled at their feet.

Sergeant Bradridge himself had selected a comfortable spot upon a milestone, with a bank behind it for his back, just as Tom appeared. All the soldiers were now at ease, save two sentries, who kept guard over the prisoner. Lee was handcuffed, but his legs were free, and he had walked with his guards. He sat now, nodded and smiled at Putt, and welcomed him gratefully. But Thomas held his nose high, walked past the prisoner, and treated Lee as one no longer to be recognised by self-respecting people.

"Morning, Uncle Sep. I knowed you was passing this way, so I took a half-holiday, an' made bold to walk across the Moor."

The sergeant was an elderly man with a ruddy face, a pompous bearing, and a feeble, kindly mouth quite concealed under heavy moustaches.

"Tom, to be sure! Sit down an' have a bite. 'Tis dooty, an' a painful dooty. But us safeguards of the land have to do dirty work so well as clean work. That poor soul—well, but come to think of it, you knowed him better'n ever I shall. 'Tis a strange world. Back along I had to march your master out of War Prison, 'cause Mr. Malherb got in a rage the day we found out about that hole under the walls; then I had to take this here poor soul down along to Plymouth; an' now I be marching him 'o be hanged. Talk o' wars! Us as stays at home have just as terrible dooties thrust upon us."

"You was always ready for anything. Nothing never puzzles you. My mother says that if an earthquake comed, you wouldn't run. But as for Jack Lee—well, I grant us liked him very well. But he turned traitor to please the women, an' I've done with him."

"Ah!—a face like his was bound to get him mixed up with the female sex."

"You didn't ought to pity him—such a renowned King's man as you be," declared Putt.

"You'm quite correct," assented the sergeant, proceeding with his bread and cheese. "But though a King's man, I'm one as looks to the bottom of my glass, and to the bottom of everything. Many a poisonous root do bear wholesome seed. I've had speech with that chap, an' I'm devilish sorry for him—sorrier than he is for himself."

"You'm such a large-minded warrior, Uncle Sep. I wish there was more Bradridge and less Putt in my character, I'm sure. Bradridges is always heroes."

"Always—to a man," admitted the sergeant. "But your mother is a very proper-minded woman, an' you've got proper feelings, though you wouldn't go for a sojer when I wanted you."

"If he'd 'listed now," said Tom, pointing with his thumb to John Lee, "he'd never have found hisself in this fix."

"True for you. I wish I could take him to barracks 'stead of Exeter gaol. A modest man; and since I give him your message that 'twas well with the young lady, he's been quite content. He told me he didn't fear death no more than I do."

"All comes of bad company," replied his nephew. "I was half in mind to take the man's hand just now, but I couldn't bring myself to do it."

The sergeant shook his head.

"That's the Putt blood in you, Thomas. A Bradridge would never turn against a broken man just 'cause his life had fallen out crooked. Granted he've done wrong. Very well; he'm going to suffer for it. If you'd been tempted by a pretty maid, mayhap you'd be in the same box."

"He'm a traitor an' he tried to help they Yankees out of prison. That's enough for me," said Putt stoutly. "Us'll leave him to his righteous fate. See here, Uncle Sep, here's a brave fish I've brought 'e, knowing what a tooth you've got for Dart salmon. I thought as Mother Coaker—to Westover Farm where you lie to-night—would cook it for your supper."

Without words Sergeant Bradridge smelt the fish carefully; then his face shone.

"Fresh as a rose!" he said.

"Caught essterday morn."

"You'm a good boy, Tom, an' I thank you. Call that chap there who's just had a drink in the river. I'll send him forward with this here fish an' give him a pound of it for his trouble. He knows the way."

Thomas obeyed, and in ten minutes a soldier had started off with his sergeant's supper, while Putt professed great amazement.

"What power to put in one man's hands. You can order 'em about seemingly like a shepherd orders his dog! In these parts, of course, the name of Bradridge is a masterpiece. I lay they'll all turn out at Buckfastleigh as you go marching through."

"'Tis right a man's native town should mark his fame," said the soldier. "Of course my name be a household word there; and for that very reason I'm going round by King's Wood and Bilberry Hill, so as this poor chap shan't have all the eyes of the town upon him."

"'Tis a rough road."

"Not to me. I've knowed the way ever since I was breeched."

"Well," said Putt, rising, "I wish you kindly, Uncle Sep, and I hope you'll take it proper in me to have come. There's a chap going up through Dean Wood with a cart in a minute and I'll get a lift part o' the way to home."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you and I won't forget it. I've often thought, Thomas, as my maid 'Liza wouldn't say 'no' to you. Hast ever turned your mind to her?"

"Never reckoned I was good enough."

"Well, modesty's a very proper part of youth; but in love-making it can be carried too far. Think of it. She'm homely, but for that matter so be you. An' none the worse for that. Us can't all have picture-book faces."

"Like that poor chap-fallen gallows man there. Well, good-bye to 'e. An' my dooty."

Tom shook hands with his uncle, moved a step or two off and glanced irresolutely where John Lee sat between the standing soldiers. His hands were under his chin and his elbows on his knees.

"Be damned if I can bring myself to do it!" said Putt aloud; whereupon Sergeant Bradridge rose from the milestone and laid a hand upon his nephew's shoulder.

"Don't harden your heart against him, my lad. He's in a tight place, and no man can ever give him more than a handshake and a 'God speed.' It won't hurt 'e to wish him better luck in a better world; an', being your comrade, you ought to do it."

Putt scowled in the direction of John Lee.

"If you say it's my dooty—you're such a masterful man. You get my secrets out of me like a lawyer! To tell truth, I had a dozen pages for the fellow from Fox Tor Farm. And a last word from a maiden too. A good few tears have been shed for the chap, as hadn't an enemy in the world an' scores o' friends. 'Twas Kekewich axed me to speak to him; an' I named you, an' said as you'd never let me do it. And old Kek, he said, 'Your Uncle Bradridge is a man of valour an' a man knowed for his righteous character. Such as him,' Kek said, 'with a wife an' children an' a good heart, ain't going to stand between an orphan lad on his way to the gallows, and a last message from his friends.' He said also, 'Give the sergeant this here token with an old man's respects to a hero, an' ax him from me to let you just have five minutes with poor Jack Lee out o' ear-shot o' the sojers. This money,' he says, 'ban't no more'n a sign of respect for his character as a sojer and a Christian; an' if there wasn't such men as him in the nation, us would have had Boney over long afore to-day,' says Kekewich."

"An' you wasn't going to deliver the old man's message?"

"Didn't think 'twas worth while, for I never knowed, Uncle

Sep, that you was so powerful a sojer you could allow me to go aside an' have a talk with the rascal. Not as I wants to, I'm sure. 'Why,' I said to Kek, 'a general couldn't do it, let alone my Uncle Bradridge!' An' Kek, he says, 'Your uncle's every bit so good as a general in this job. He've got sole command, and his word's law. Sergeants be the very thews of an army,' said Kek, an' I suppose I ought to have believed him."

"Certainly you did," declared the warrior. "Every word he told you was truth. He'm a wise old man, and knows very well what he'm talking about. But as to money—'tis a ticklish thing to name it."

"So I told him, but he said you'd understand better'n a green lad like me. 'Do 'e think I'd offer money to a great man like Septimus Bradridge?' I asked him. An' he said, 'I've got far too much respect for him to dream of such an insult; but I want him to take this here twenty pound just as a token of admiration from an old man who once had a son a sojer. And if he'll let you have ten minutes with poor Jack, so as to cheer him up afore he goes into the Valley of the Shadow—why, 'tis only a sign he's as big in his heart as his valour, and nought to do at all with my present to him.'"

Tom pulled out the money and handed it to Sergeant Bradridge.

"I'm glad you remembered your dooty," said his uncle sternly, taking the notes and putting them into his breast. "An' 'tis lucky that I'm a parent and a man above suspicion of a mean trick; so I can take this here momentum just the same as I'd take a medal for valour—in a big military spirit. You'll bear me witness I've twice axed you to speak to the prisoner afore; an' now I ax you to speak to him again."

"If as my Uncle Septimus you command me, I must obey," said Putt reluctantly; "but I vow I won't be left with him over fifteen minutes. I can say all I've got to say inside that time. An', though the sojers mus'n't listen, I'd rather for 'em not to be too far off, for he might turn upon me."

"A handcuffed man! To think my sister's son be a coward!"

"He'm a desperate chap, an' us ban't all born with your great courage. If I sit 'pon yonder bank with him above the bridge, us won't be heard: an' if he sits 'pon top of the bank you can keep your eye upon us. Out of your sight I will not trust myself with that man."

"That's reasonable," admitted the sergeant; "let him keep his head over the grass, so as I can see him all the while I smoke my pipe."

He looked at his watch. "Fifteen minutes or so you shall have—him being an orphan."

"Don't make it a minute longer, for 'tis a very nasty job for me. An' if I call out, I pray you'll run an' save me," implored Putt.

With open contempt Sergeant Bradridge gave his order, and in a few moments Tom found himself alone beside John Lee on a shady bank above the stream. Some thirty yards and a hillock of grass now separated him from the soldiers; while a little further off, sitting on the milestone, Tom's uncle lighted his pipe, felt a pleasant crispness at his breast, and kept his eyes firmly fixed upon the back of John Lee's head.

CHAPTER XV

THE SALMON IS SPOILED

SERGEANT BRADBRIDGE smoked his tobacco, thought of his twenty pounds, of his salmon, and of his high position in the world.

"Some," he reflected, "might say that Tom there would never have seen yonder poor chap but for they two ten-pound notes. But old Kekewich knowed better. 'Tis merely a momentum. Give me an old man if you want an understanding man."

Nobody had ever before presented the soldier with twenty pounds, and the sensation was not only pleasant, but tended to the increase of self-respect. His days had been uneventful, and albeit an admirable officer, accident kept him at home despite the stirring times. He was a great recruiter, and had sent many a lad to the wars, though never himself had he heard a shot fired in anger. The hour was at hand when he would do so; and that in his own mother-county of Devon. Now he thought upon his wife and family, and then concerning the prisoner. Heartily he regretted John Lee's fate, but knew no way to mend it.

Meantime the doomed man and Putt conversed with earnestness. Their talk was of a practical nature, and they wasted not a moment in vain sorrow.

Tom told his friend the news and the solemn promise that Grace Malherb had given to Norcot.

"No man can save me if I won't be saved," said John. "It only makes death easier to know what hangs upon it."

"We've got but minutes," answered the other; "an' 'tis a fool's trick to die if you can live. Dead, you're no good to none but worms and body-snatchers; alive, you can't tell what might come along. You've got to get out of this coil without Norcot's help; then she's free again. 'Twas only if he freed you—not if you freed yourself."

"'Tis beyond human power."

"'Tis as easy as eating. D'you see that cart full of muck? Behind the tail-board there's a place scraped out big enough to hold you. An' there's a knot-hole in the bottom of the cart where you can put your mouth so you won't be choked. 'Twill be a thought foul, but better'n a rope. Here's a file for them bracelets presently. Wait a moment and watch."

Putt went across to the cart and opened the tail-board, behind which a space had been scooped in the farmyard stuff. Then he took a bundle of the dirty straw, rolled it into a ball, and returned to John Lee.

"'Tis a matter of moments now," he said. "Yonder chap, pretending to be asleep under the trees, only waits for you to slip in the cart; then he'll cover you up deep and set off through Dean Wood."

While he spoke Tom rolled his ball of straw into the shape of a head and stuck it upon his stick. Next he watched his uncle through the grass, and when Bradridge had turned away for a moment to speak to a soldier, John Lee's hat was thrust upon the dummy, while John himself slipped down the bank. Tom Putt's uncle, from his standpoint, still supposed that he saw the condemned man's head, and his nephew talking earnestly beside the prisoner; but in reality John was already under a mass of hot ordure behind the tail-board of the cart; and a moment later the vehicle took its lumbering way among the soldiers. It crept through the little camp, then ascended a hill upon the driver's left hand, and slowly disappeared from view in the direction of Dean Wood.

Meantime Putt sat by John Lee's hat on the stick and watched his uncle. The precious minutes passed until at last Sergeant Bradridge looked at his watch again, rose, and knocked the burning tobacco from his pipe.

Thereupon Thomas played his part. He removed Lee's hat and flung it into the river, where it floated fast down stream; he then struck himself a formidable blow on the side of the face with his stick, and shouting with all his might, himself leapt down into the water. It took him to his middle, and he waded deeper.

"Help, help, Uncle Sep! Help, sojers! Help: you'll never hang him, for he'll drown hisself, sure as death!"

A dozen redcoats answered Tom's bawling, and Sergeant Bradridge also ran to the spot as fast as he was able.

"He's done for me—I shall die!" cried Putt, holding his face; "I know'd how 'twould be. He leapt up like lightning, and then struck me with his handcuffed hands. I'll swear my jaw's broke. 'Death by water's better'n hanging!' he says, an' flings hisself into the river!"

"There's his hat," said a soldier; "but his head isn't under it."

"Get in the water! Get in the water!" shouted Sergeant Bradridge. "With his hands fast together he'll be drowned like a dog wi' a brick round his neck!"

"If he's carried under the bridge you'll lose him sure as death. Oh, my head! an' I never said a hard word to the man."

They waded in the rolling reaches of Dean Burn, but found nothing; then, at the sergeant's direction, his men prepared to make a drag that they might scrape the bottom of the river.

"There's scarce water to drown a sheep," said a soldier. "Are you sure of this chap?" he added, and looked at Putt.

Tom, still nearly up to his waist in the river, took the insult ill.

"Sure o' me, you gert cock-eyed lobster! Sure o' me! Ban't your officer my own uncle? Better you comed in the water to help than talk against your betters. But you'm too frightened of wetting your pipe-clay and getting more work! Do a man have his jaw split for fun? I hope as you'll be shot first time ever you go to war; an' a good riddance!"

"All the same," answered the soldier, "there was a cart full of straw went by ten minutes ago. Might be wise to overtake it and see that all's open and honest."

"I never took my eyes off the prisoner's head," declared Bradridge. "I suppose you'll not call my sight in question, Private Chugg?"

"No, sergeant; no man living's got a sharper eye; but there's heads and there's hats. How if his head weren't under his hat when you see'd it 'pon the mound there?"

"Three of you run up along after thicky cart, an' us'll scour the river banks," said Bradridge; "an' if there's any hookem-snivey dealings, Thomas Putt, 'tis you who will swing at Exeter, not t'other."

"You'll be sorry for that speech, Uncle Sep, when us gets his

gashly carkiss out the water," answered Tom calmly. "He's here, I tell you—sunk down into some hole at the bottom—and dead as a hammer by now. An' if he ban't here, where is he? Tell me that?"

The soldiers hunted and probed without success; then they went down the stream and searched beneath the bridge and in every place where a fugitive might lurk with his head above water.

Meanwhile others, led by Private Chugg, ran fast, and soon overtook the cart that had conveyed John Lee. It stood half-way up a steep hill in the woods, with a stone stuck beneath one wheel while the horse rested.

Without ceremony, and despite fierce protests from Tom Putt's friend, the soldiers pitched the entire contents of this vehicle into the road. But they found nothing. Their prisoner had left his unpleasant quarters ten minutes before, and was now half a mile away in the deep woods of Dean.

Throughout that night the screech owls heard a steady sound like their own harsh voices, but subdued to a murmur. It was John at his handcuffs. To separate them proved a difficult task, even with Tom Putt's file; but that done, the man was quickly free.

Far away, as evening fell, Mr. Norcot waited with admirable patience for the arrival of Sergeant Bradridge and his prisoner; while Mother Coaker of Westover Farm mourned a good fish wasted. Tom Putt's salmon, despairing of being eaten, had fallen to pieces in the pot.

He's
-and
he?

they
din
bove

soon
-way
one

utt's
into
his
mile

und
was
ask,
ckly

ble
er ;
fish
nad

BOOK IV
THE PEACE

CHAPTER I

HOPE WAKES AND DIES

ON a day in late autumn, while sad winds whispered of winter and the heather blossoms perished, Harvey Woodman and Thomas Putt were setting up hurdles round about a portion of a turnip field. Hard by Uncle Smallridge sat upon a stone, chewed tobacco and watched them. This aged man had made a close study of Providence's work at Fox Tor Farm, and, finding that all the evils resulting from the demolition of Childe's Tomb had fallen upon the head of Malherb, he felt increased respect for the logic of Heaven. Now he approached the labourers fearlessly, discussed the state of affairs with relish, and threw his weight upon the side of justice. But the household of Malherb showed an inclination to think the farmer too hardly treated. According to their measure of intelligence and gratitude, they mourned the master's evil fortune.

"He's changed under our living eyes," said Woodman.

"A scantle of his old self, an' goes heavily with backward glances as though the wisht-hounds was arter him day an' night," declared Putt. "So meek as Moses now most times. I miss the thunder of him. We'm so used to it that he seems like a new man without his noise."

"Not but he flashes up, like a dying fire, now an' again, however," added Woodman.

Uncle Smallridge chewed and nodded and uttered complacent platitudes.

"What did I say? What a picture of the wrath of the loving God! You won't find in all Scripture no case where the Lord took a matter into His own hands quicker an' polished off a sinner so sharp. First his son cut down; then his darter undutiful; then that tantara to the War Prison; then Lovey Lee carried away by the Devil, as I hopes an' believes; an' then Jack

Lee vanished like a cloud; an' a bad wool year; an' wages coming by fits an' starts; an' doom writ upon the man's forehead. 'Tis all the hatched-out egg of the Lord. Full of meat—full of meat are His ways."

"Hard enough to stomach all the same," said Woodman; and Putt viewed the ancient with considerable disgust.

"You'm worse than Kekewich," he declared. "You fatten on other folks' troubles, like a crow on offal. I'd blush to smack my lips over a brave man's cares. Who gave 'e that tobacco you'm chowing?"

"Mr. Malherb," confessed Uncle. "An open-handed gentleman as need be, an' a good friend to me. An' why not? 'Tis the duty of the gentlefolks to support such as me. I've growed two-double working for 'em. An' now my balance of years be their proper business. I've nought against him myself; I be only pointing out how much the Lord had against him. We'm all corn for the A'mighty's grindstones; an' a very comforting thought that is for a common man. There's justice there." He waved to the sky. "Us shan't be driven about to work for small money an' bad masters in Eternity; but sit 'pon golden thrones an' share the property with the best of 'em."

"You're a Whig," said Woodman. "They talk like that in the Parliament."

"I be what I be. I know there won't be no squires an' bandogs an' man-traps an' spring-guns to maim honest men up-along. If us be all equal in Heaven, that should be the rule on earth, same as the Lord prayed in His own Prayer."

"You'd better keep them ideas till you get to Heaven then," said Thomas Putt; "for they won't work on Dartymoor."

As he spoke Mr. Beer arrived, and with him he brought interesting news.

"Leave that, souls," he said; "since the weather's lifted, us have all got to go along with master to Hangman's Hollow 'bout that job there was talk of a fortnight since. He's made up his mind all on a sudden. Go back to the farm for ropes an' picks, then come along."

"What's in the wind now, neighbour?" inquired Uncle Smalridge, and Beer answered him.

"Why, 'tis the hole where Miss Grace was found. 'Tis said 'twas old Lovey Lee's den afore she bolted. Dinah heard a

whisper of treasures there, too. Anyway us have got to go an' pull the place down an' let in light an' air, so as us can see if there be aught worth fetching."

Uncle Smallridge went his way speculating as to what was the next unpleasant surprise hidden for Malherb by the Lord of Hosts; while Putt, Woodman and Beer returned home. They collected their tools and set out soon afterwards with Mark Bickford for Hangman's Hollow.

The first result of his present experiences and position had been a development of astounding patience in Maurice Malherb. Patient, indeed, he was not in any real sense; but a self-control relatively wonderful marked his goings now. He waited for the inevitable. Every instinct called out to him to hasten it, yet he took no step. This personal attitude amazed him in secret. Sometimes even a gleam of hope touched his darkness, and the fact that no word had been heard of Lovey, and no report of her death had reached mankind, awoke a shadowy thought that she was not dead. But he knew right well that no human foot trod the desert south of Cater's Beam once in a year. The dead might there mingle with dust and never be discovered or recorded. He did nothing from day to day for thinking of his wife and daughter. They stood between him and open confession of the crime. Yet each week of delay galled him worse than the last. Memory kept such a vivid wakefulness as it only holds under conditions of remorse. His sin coloured his life, and the hues of it faded neither by day nor night. As the hideous incubus of a dream slowly crawls upon us, to fasten its fangs in our bosom, so this horror nightly destroyed sleep, and by day it rode abroad with him, ate with him, thought with him, thrust its shadow between him and the few things he still loved.

A thousand times his feet turned to Cater's Beam, a thousand times he chose rather to live on and cherish the pallid hope that his daughter and his wife were not for ever disgraced. For him the events of that appalling dawn were neither gyves nor ropes about his real nature. He had long since retraced all in spirit, probed his act to the core, and even taken the consequences of it. For no thought of self-destruction returned to him; but his women came between and held his hand, and, though they knew it not, played the first part in his hidden life, as they now stood openly for all that he still held dear.

Yet at last, by an indirect road, he consented to satisfy himself, and after countless petitions from Grace and from Annabel, he gave way and abandoned what, from their standpoint, was a senseless determination. His daughter finally prevailed with him.

"Lovey Lee fled to save her own life," declared Grace. "Perhaps she never returned to her hiding-place at all. There, then, remain her treasures and the amphora that I saw with my own eyes. Surely it is worth the trouble of a search?"

"'Twould be fifteen thousand pounds at least to us. Your brother himself might purchase it," said Annabel.

"He at least never will," answered her husband. "Rather would I grind it under my heel. 'Brother'! 'Tis too noble a title for him. Norcot can offer to aid me in my extremity, yet he whose duty it should be, and whose privilege—does he come forward?"

"For the best of all reasons, dearest. You have not told him a word of your circumstances."

"'Told him'! Do such things want telling to a brother? He ought to feel it in his bones; he ought to dream that all is not well with me; he ought to breathe it in with the air. If he were in trouble, my blood would have beat it into my heart. Nevertheless, no farthing of his would I take to keep my wife and daughter from starving."

"Yet here's your own money as like as not hid within five miles," said Grace. "How I've longed to go! Once I rode in sight, and I never felt so tempted to break my word to you, dear father. But I was glad afterwards, for, looking back, I marked a man moving in the ruin. He saw me too and vanished."

The matter dropped then; yet, within a week Malherb resolved to permit a search. To him the enterprise must be a crucial test of matters more vital than the amphora. If it was there, then Lovey indeed had perished; if it was not there, then she lived. But the truth might still be buried in his own bosom. It was not necessary that others should know of it; and, in any case, the circumstances of his family must be ameliorated by recovery of the treasure. That fact alone he strove to keep before him; yet now, as he tramped over the Moor with his daughter, and saw wan sunlight all soaked in moisture, spread great fleeting vans along the way, he prayed very earnestly that his mission might fail.

Grace was silent and busy with her own thoughts. That Lovey Lee had long since escaped from Dartmoor and taken her treasure with her, the girl felt certain ; but that John Lee might be using the cavern in Hangman's Hollow seemed likely enough. His escape was a nine days' wonder, and some persons, Sergeant Bradridge among the number, stoutly maintained that John must have been born to drown and had met his destiny. The sergeant was back at Prince Town ; only Kekewich knew of Putt's successful proceedings ; while, as for Peter Norcot, he took this further rebuff from fortune smiling, and absented himself from Fox Tor Farm for a considerable time. For the present he was reported to be very diligent about his own affairs.

"You dream," said Malherb. "Twice I have spoken and received no answer, Grace."

"I did dream—of the blessedness of finding this treasure ; yet I am sure 'tis too late to hope."

Her father sighed.

"Who can tell?" he said.

Only the carrion crows, that croaked aloft out of the morning air and flapped their sooty wings towards Cater's Beam, knew the truth. Often with his eyes he followed them out of sight ; with his mind's eye he saw what they saw ; and that was never out of sight.

Presently the labourers drew up in Hangman's Hollow and stood amazed at the secret which Grace revealed to them. From the top, Beer and Woodman set to work ; and Putt and Bickford attacked the place beneath. They cut away the masses of briar and undergrowth that bound the foundations of the old blowing-house, forced a hole in the wall, and made entry from that point. Malherb also toiled and wearied his body with great feats of strength to distract his mind.

"If us should catch the old cat-a-mountain now !" said Woodman. "My stars, she'd scratch our faces to the bone, I lay !"

But the treasure house was empty. They let in light from every side, and after two hours' hard work had dismantled the den. Sweet air searched its dark corners ; day illuminated its secrets.

Malherb's heart fell as Grace pointed to two great boxes of plate and jewels ; but it rose with a bound, for they proved to be empty. Where Lovey's money-bags had stood and leered at

Grace out of the darkness, like a row of little pot-bellied fiends roosting there, they found nothing. The ledges were bare. Malherb made no attempt to conceal his exultation. Dissimulation was impossible before his growing hope. He toiled like a giant, tore his clothes and smothered himself in dust and dirt.

"Not a watch—not a coin—not a teaspoon!" he shouted. "All gone—everything. But don't give up yet; seek and seek; make very sure. Tear every stone from another; break every stone in half. Dig up the floors; sound the nooks and crannies. Let no shadow of doubt remain!"

The men spoke under their breath to one another.

"He'm going daft, or I am," said Putt. "The less we find, the better he likes it!"

"'Tis his troubles have turned his head," answered Beer. "I've knowed it happen so. Look at him—all in a muck o' sweat like a common man."

Woodman, as he ripped up the floor, discovered a hole by Lovey's stone altar.

"See here, your honour; I be much feared something's been took out of this place. 'Tis lined wi' stone an' the cover lies beside it. But 'tis empty."

Maurice Malherb smiled and approached eagerly.

"Yes, yes; even here might she have hidden her treasure—not a doubt of it—not a doubt. Say!" he continued to Bickford, who stood nearest to him, "don't stand like a clown carved in wood. Speak. Tell me—is it not clear something has been lifted up from here and carried off?"

"Clear enough," answered the man in a surly voice. "Us was only wondering, begging your honour's pardon, why for you was so mighty pleased to find your trouble wasted."

"Then take yourself and your insolent wonder from Fox Tor Farm to-morrow at daybreak!" cried Malherb. The old flash was in his eyes, the old deep thunder in his voice.

"Jimmery! he'm coming back to hisself!" murmured Putt.

Then Malherb spoke again.

"Wonder as you will. What are your thoughts to me? Work—work on—all of you, and keep your wonder to yourselves."

His daughter, like the rest, felt upon the brink of mystery, yet doubted not but that her father would presently explain. She was bitterly disappointed yet not surprised.

At last Malherb flung down a pick and mopped his forehead.

"'Tis done—to the last corner!" he cried. "And what have we found?"

"A dead dog, some old rotten boxes, some candle-ends and some crustes, your honour," said Mr. Beer.

"So be it. I thank God—before you all I thank God! And let each man remember this day!"

He pulled off two heavy signet rings, the only adornments that he wore, gave one to Beer and the other to Harvey Woodman.

"Keep them for a sign of your fruitless labour. And you men, come to me to-morrow: I've a guinea for each of you. Remember, all, that I'm your best friend for evermore. I'll never forget one of ye! You stare, you good, worthy clods—well, stare and wonder. It is your part to do so. Know at least that my heart is light."

He turned, drew on his coat, then gave his daughter his arm. He seemed to have shaken off a weight of years with his hard work. His step was elastic, his head was thrown back.

"I cannot say that I am sorry any more when I see your joy, dear father. Yet, like the men, I wonder too. But I will not ask you why you are glad to have lost your treasure, or I may get answered as Bickford was."

"The rascal had an impudent tone in his voice, though I'll swear he meant no offence. But for you, indeed, do not ask, my little maid. 'Tis enough that what looks evil news is not so. This day, as the wrecked sailor, who, from his perilous spar floating on ocean, sees suddenly a great ship at hand, and finds salvation even in the grave of his hopes, even so am I. I—I have been through dark waters—I have suffered to the very last hiding-places of the heart. My life turned upon me and rent me. My wrath roused up such a devil as I knew not man could harbour. God hid His face and I was lost in the darkness. But now—now my cup is full. He has spared me; He has lifted my load. I must commune with Him. I cannot talk to mankind until I have praised the name of the Lord. With David I could dance before Him, because He has made my heart whole again and lifted my head in my own sight."

"Then will I bless God too, dear father. Indeed, your face says more to me than your words. You are grown young. There is even laughter in your eyes again."

He held her hand and pressed it.

"Money's not everything—how well I know that," she said.

"'Tis nothing—less than nothing—glorified mould—scum—a dirty mantle on the deep water of life—the poisonous berries we children clutch at. I hate it. I scorn it. The gilded moss in that hole there—the moss that will grow black and die in the glare of day—that is money. Let in light and we see it as it is."

"You never cared for money."

"And now less than before. A man might live in that den we've just torn down, and live happy, too, if he'd escaped from such dreams as have of late tormented me. This hour, with my own hands, would I build up a hut of stone and shaggy heath and dwell therein for ever rather than go back to yesterday. But yesterday is past, and to-morrow I shall make holiday and hold a revel that all must share if they still want my friendship."

"You are your dear self again!"

"What is myself? What am I? I have been a storm-cloud drifting over men's heads to burst in unseasonable hail. Now will I be a sun to shine upon men's hearts and warm 'em. Oh, I have learnt wisdom in a dreadful book; but leave that. Talk about her—the old woman—so tough and so terrible in her ways. She's far enough off now—in France, I'll wager."

"Indeed, she may be. I hope rather that poor John Lee is safe. He haunted me to-day. It seemed so possible that he might have chosen this place. Why, father, father! what has happened? Forgive me; I should not have named him."

She stopped, for Malherb suddenly stood still and stared up into the sky. The gladness fell away from his face like sunlight suddenly shadowed. He struck one fist thrice into his open palm, then dropped his hands again.

"Forgive me—I have hurt you cruelly," cried the girl. "I had thought you quite pardoned John Lee."

"Yes," he said gently; "I had pardoned him and I had forgot him too. Poor fool of one thought that I am! He knew—he knew this secret place and the wealth stored in it! 'Tis possible—nay, certain—that he rifled all. Who would blame him? 'Twas he whom you saw from far off in the ruins."

"Never! Had he found the amphora— Is he not a Malherb himself?"

"Hold your peace," her father answered, in a voice grown harsh

again "That man has all, and who shall blame him? He may well hold it his dead father's portion. I, that thought I had awakened, only dreamed. Things are as they were."

"Oh, if I could understand! If I could help you in this suffering that you hide from us!"

"It is impossible. A dream, I say. Things are as they were."

He turned to her and she heard his voice sink down into a dreary lifeless monotone.

"The ship has passed by; but no man has seen the struggling wretch in the water or heard him shout."

"Come home," she said. "This suffering will kill you. If you would but let those who love you—— A great grief, though nothing shared by three, may break the heart of one."

Next morning Putt and Bickford approached their master in the farmyard and ventured to remind him of his promise. He had forgotten it, and now turned upon them and cursed them for a pair of greedy fools.

"Guineas—guineas! What have you to do with them? Madmen! If you only knew. There—take them, and get out of my sight. You can grin still. Gather enough of that and you'll grin no more!"

He dashed down the money at their feet and turned his back upon them.

CHAPTER II

ON CHRISTMAS DAY

MR. NORCOT invited himself to Fox Tor Farm for Christmas, but Maurice Malherb begged him to change his mind. Peter's generous offer of a loan had not been accepted; but he knew that Fox Tor Farm was now mortgaged to meet Malherb's demands.

Within the home circle a great difference of opinion obtained, yet it was impossible to argue the matter out, because it referred to Lovey Lee. Grace felt positive that the miser had returned to her hiding-place; the master expressed an opinion equally strong that John Lee had abstracted the fortune and hastened with it for safety to the Continent. His reasons he would not give; but that made no uncommon difficulty, for he was not used to offer reasons. His daughter marvelled at his obstinacy, for her heart well knew that John was incapable of such an act. He understood the significance of the amphora, and would have gloried to restore it at any personal risk. The matter slowly ceased to be a subject of conversation, not that Malherb forbade it, for he longed to discuss the possibility, and welcomed any shadow of hope; but now rumours of peace had grown into a promise. It seemed to Grace Malherb as though her ambitions for John Lee and Cecil Stark were to be realised; because while peace with America was soon to be declared, Bonaparte had left Elba, and Europe awakened from her brief respite.

Malherb sank into a settled but a gentle melancholy. Gloom folded him like a garment; yet he was kindly and even considerate to all. He ceased to hunt, a circumstance that brought more tears to his wife's eyes than any other, for she appreciated its full force. A thousand times he had dreaded the day when his passion for sport could be gratified no more. She had heard him desire to die before infirmity should keep him from riding to

hounds. Now he abandoned his delight without a murmur; at a wrench he tore twenty years out of his book of life and performed the operation with indifference. In secret he marvelled at himself and at the tremendous operations of chance that could thus alter the whole ingrained tenour and bent of his existence.

Christmas came, and Grace with her mother rode to worship at Holne. Harvey Woodman was responsible for Annabel's safety, since she sat on a pillion behind him; while Grace rode 'Caesar.'

"Peace comes to us through every sense," said Mrs. Malherb as they returned homeward. "It is in the air to feel, on men's tongues to hear, in their eyes to see. 'Peace on earth,' too, I pray. Peace everywhere, but——"

She broke off with a sigh. To speak further was not possible before Mr. Woodman. But now Harvey made a diversion. They were at the top of Ter Hill, half a mile distant from home, when his keen eyes caught sight of a small black object afar off on the Moor. He watched a while, then spoke.

"If there ban't that baggering sow as got out a week ago an' master thought was stolen! 'Tis her for sartain."

The wandering beast was a distinguished matron, and her loss had caused annoyance.

"How glad the master will be!" cried Mrs. Malherb. "Don't lose sight of her on any account, Woodman. Indeed, you will do well to follow her at once. I can easily walk home from here."

She alighted, and Harvey galloped off to secure the pig.

"Send Bickford or one of 'em after me!" he shouted back to the ladies.

The day was fine and the Moor dry and frozen, but Bickford grumbled not a little at his duty, for the Christmas dinner only waited to be eaten when Mrs. Malherb and her daughter returned. The servants' hall was full of grateful savours; the peat blazed in a pure, still heart of red-hot fire under a purple corona of flame; the walls were decked with holly and fir; it was a scene painful to leave. But the labourer soon returned, for he had not gone far when he met Harvey riding homeward at a great pace.

"Where's the pig to?" he asked.

"'Twas no pig at all, but a message from Heaven," gasped Mr. Woodman.

"If I didn't know, I should say you was drunk," answered

Bickford : "but you wouldn't have dared get in liquor, having to ride back with missis. Be you mazed or pixy-led in daylight?"

"Mazed I be—to think—but five mile from our very doors—that awful—my flesh be creaming to my bones with the sight, an' my scalp's crawling down my back."

"You've caught the small-pox, I reckon. I'd best walk to windward of 'e."

"I can say nought till I stand afore the company. Then I'll properly terrify the whole pack of 'e."

As they entered the servants' hall Maurice Malherb was already standing over a great sirloin at one end of the table, while Mr. Beer carved two turkeys at the other. Threads of holly berries glittered against the shining green. There was a smell of gravy and evergreens in the air, and bright sunshine poured through the windows. On Christmas Day the family dined with their men and women, for it was an old custom of the Malherbs to do so.

Now appeared Harvey Woodman, and conscious that perhaps the greatest moment of his life had come, he determined to make the most of it.

"For the love of charity a drop of brandy, souls!" he cried. "Oh, your honour's goodness—such a shock as I've had—such a thing! I falled away in my middle when I seed it an' nigh dropped off the hoss."

"Fegs!" said Bickford, "when I comed to un, the man looked as if he'd been drawed through a brimble hedge backwards!"

Mrs. Woodman rushed to her husband's side, and Malherb, putting down the carvers, also approached.

"Speak," he said. "What has happened? Are you ill?"

"The pig, the pig, your honour. To the Beam her went—straight as any Christian; an' me after her. Then, far beyond, in they gashly bogs where the Jacky-twoads dance on moony summer nights, I seed the horriddest sight ever these eyes rested on. I knowed there was a dead thing there very soon, an' thought 'twas a pony. But when I comed nearer—the—let me have another drink—my inward organs turn to vinegar when I think upon it."

"Speak on," said Malherb. He stood before Mr. Woodman with his eyes fixed upon him.

"First I seed a great patch of rotted turf; for a dead body decays the grass under it, your honour; then I seed a litter of bones lying on the stones around about, where the crows an'

buzzards had carried 'em for cleaner picking; an' then—lor—amercy! a human face—bone staring at me with hollow eyes an' grinning like Death! I plucked up courage, however, an' got off my hoss an' went up to the rames of the poor soul. An' next thing I knowed was that I'd found out the secret of that old mullygrubs, Lovey Lee! To hell the old vixen went; not to France as was thought, for there was an awful crack in her skull upon the brow. All rags an' bones she was; an' I seed her old petticoat made of stolen sacks, an' her sun-bonnet, caught in a thorn bush an' black wi' blood yet; an' the long white hair of her shed round about in locks hither an' thither, like the cotton grass that waves on the bogs. Let me drink, for the picture of that unholy masterpiece do cleave to my brain like nails to a rock."

A great hum of excitement followed upon this news. Then Malherb spoke

"Let us eat our dinner with what appetite we may," he said, in a dull and hollow voice. "Forget what we have heard until to-morrow. Then we will go with a sledge and a pair of oxen and gather up her dust and coffin it."

"Don't let the old varmint lie beside that American gentleman, your honour's goodness," said Dinah Beer; "for 'twould be an unseemly thing that such evil earth should rise, come Judgment, so near his c'y."

Malherb stared round the table and spoke again in the heavy accents of one who talks in sleep.

"She shall lie at Widecombe in holy ground; and when we bury her I will tell you something concerning her."

They supposed that he spoke of Lovey Lee's rumoured treasures. Then the meal began, but no joy accompanied it. The men whispered, and Woodman repeated his story again and again, adding some particulars with each recital.

The banquet had turned into a funeral feast, whereat nobody loved the dead. This tragedy, indeed, added a zest to their food; they could not leave the subject, but returned to it between every mouthful. Then, like thunder upon their whisperings and excited speculations, burst the master's voice.

"Have done, ghouls! Cease to speak of this matter any more. Do you not remember that the house honours your board to-day? Sweeten your speech, I pray you."

Everybody lapsed into uneasy silence and soon afterwards Malherb, his wife and daughter, rose and left the company.

Then the voices broke loose and this rare business was turned and twisted and tasted by many tongues.

That night Maurice Malherb told his wife the thing he had done; and she thrust her meek disposition behind her and derided the crime as nothing, even while her teeth chattered with terror to hear him tell it.

"We are the ministers of God," she said. "To you fell this dreadful duty. It is well, because you had to do it. Forget it—pray God to let you forget it. None else must know but your wife."

"The sin—the sin. You are blind to that, or pretend to be. Heaven forces no man into sin. To say so is to deny free will. I have ever been on the side of freedom."

"She was doomed to die."

"Her death was the hangman's work—not mine. Murder! A Malherb a common murderer."

"Sins are forgiven before they are committed. The Lord was born and died to forgive this deed."

"Vain comfort. What is forgiveness to me? 'Tis a bribe for women and children. Can it make a reasonable man easy? God may forgive me; can I forgive myself? There lies the poison of evil-doing. This awful climax to my life of wrath has brought about such a thing as—— The Everlasting cannot give me yesterday, or bridle the sun and lead it back into the East. The thing done—the thing done—what will banish that? It lies frozen in Time for all eternity. God's own voice is vain to heal; His own hand powerless to take this sword from my heart—the sword I have planted there myself. The thing done. Yesterday! yesterday! That's the prayer that such as I am pray, and know, even while we pray, that it is in vain. She was a woman with hidden good in her, because she was human and made in the image of God; and when we put those ashes under the earth—I shall tell all that stand beside the pit that 'twas I slew her."

"You never shall!" she cried, leaping from her bed and striking flint on steel. "I have not thwarted your life until this night. I have yielded to every wish, trusted your wisdom in all things, never rebelled even in unspoken thoughts—questioned nothing.

But upon this I'll speak, and struggle, and weary the air, and weep till I madden you into sense. I've done your will for near five-and-twenty years; and please God will do it for five-and-twenty more; but to-night, I'm a maiden again—a maid of the Carews; and you shall love me, as you obeyed when you came a-courting."

"Hide that light and come to bed. You will be cold. I have spoken. At least let there be peace between us."

"There shall be no peace. You forget that you have a wife and a daughter."

"'Tis the part of sin to make us egoists—as all suffering does. And 'tis the part of sin not to stop at the sinner. God grants that interest on wickedness to the devil: that the ill deed done should strike more than he who does it."

But his wife poured out a flood of alternate entreaties and commands; and he marvelled even in that hour that the helpmate of many years had hidden so much from him.

"There is a greatness of purpose in you that I had not guessed," he said. "Maybe no man knows all of his wife until he comes before her a master sinner as I do now. She smiles on his fair hour, content to see him happy; but with storm—— It is my glory in this agony to know—— And yet no woman was ever born to lead me. To bury the dead without confession would be to act a lie. She shall have her rights and her revenge."

"We are not bound to trumpet our sins. And the rights of the dead are in the hand of the Lord. If it is His will that you suffer more than you have suffered, it will happen so. By making this unhappy thing known, you throw all into disorder, and strew many paths with difficult problems."

"What then? Difficulty is the road that every man walks."

Until dawn of day they spoke together; and then Maurice Malherb fell asleep and his wife, fancying that she had conquered, crept out of bed and knelt and thanked God for victory.

Yet her husband's waking words shattered Annabel's hope.

"I'm fixed and bate no jot of my intention," he said. "All shall know the thing I have done. I clung to the shadow of doubt like a coward. Now there is not even a shadow of doubt to cling to. Come what may to me, I'll speak. And for you—you who have shown what courage lies in you at a bad cause, now let it be your part to support a good one."

CHAPTER III

BURNHAM AS LEADER

FOR Cecil Stark a matter greater far than his own failure and the treachery that had ruined the tunnel plot centred in thoughts of John Lee and the price that he must pay. Much the American suffered before news reached him in his solitary confinement, through a friendly turnkey who knew Tom Putt. And then the prisoner heard that Grace Malherb was safe at home, and John Lee had either escaped or been drowned in attempting to do so.

As for the prisoners, like the sea after a storm, their passions slowly stilled. Once only did they break into active rage, when, upon the release of their leaders, David Leverett did not return, and a soldier confessed that he had betrayed them for two hundred pounds. Then the plot and its failure were dismissed before rumours of peace. At first these woke and died again, yet gradually a greater degree of truth characterised them, and all men felt the music of freedom and of home playing at their hearts.

But in Prince Town was witnessed the spectacle of a worthy gentleman struggling with a task somewhat beyond his strength. As Commandant of a War Prison, wherein were nearly six thousand souls, now grown turbulent and reckless at rumours of approaching liberation, Captain Short found himself involved in countless difficulties.

After the discovery and defeat of their plot, the mass of prisoners was removed and confined in Nos. 1 and 3; while, by way of comprehensive punishment for their attempt, every man was docked of one-third of his allowance for the space of ten days. Grave friction resulted from this measure, and Short's officers went in secret fear of a rising. To check the possibility of such a disaster, he adopted stringent methods, and continual strife

between the turnkeys and prisoners was the result. Both sides displayed passion, and many a sentry, for some disrespectful word concerning Congress or the President of the United States, had his head broken.

With the severe mid-winter weather, increased sickness fell upon the War Prison, and the most popular man at Prince Town in these days was Doctor Magrath, a surgeon whose humanity, energy and skill made him the personal friend of every sufferer. He struck up an acquaintance with Cecil Stark, and, at the doctor's advice, the young American henceforth eschewed prison politics and threw all his weight upon the side of law, order and patience.

A partial exchange of prisoners had wakened general hopes, but when it was found that nothing more in that sort would be done, the Americans vented their annoyance by playing a thousand pranks upon authority. On one occasion a man was seen ostentatiously escaping out of a window by moonlight. When challenged he refused to answer and continued to descend a rope. The guard at Short's own order fired, rushed in as the figure fell heavily to the earth, and found a dummy. Unfortunately, such jests bred an evil temper, and once when certain soldiers discovered a candle burning by night and ordered its extinction, they fired a volley through the windows almost before it had been possible to comply with their demand. By a miracle no harm was done, but every prisoner knew next day how the watch had fired upon sleeping men, and the soldiery justly suffered under the lash of a thousand tongues.

William Burnham it was who suspected that the outbursts of severity probably marked British reverses at sea; and the thing became a jest, so that whenever a hard word was spoken, or a harsh punishment ordered, the Americans shouted together and cheered their country's successes.

Burnham, indeed, had come into distinction of late days. Despite the advice of Stark and others, who now preached patience and obedience while all waited for peace, Burnham, ever jealous of his old messmate, and glad to find himself a leader of men, stayed not to consider the manner of men he led, but stood for a factious and unruly multitude, and promised to support their fancied rights. Ira Anson joined this party also, and to him as much as Burnham belonged the discredit of various

ill-timed and vicious commotions. Their conduct maddened Short, and finally they led him into tribulation and themselves paid the penalty.

With the end of the year came a persistent rumour that the crew of the *Marblehead* was about to be exchanged, but this hoped-for circumstance did not happen, and William Burnham, with his faction, grew more desperate and more unwise. Unfortunately, they numbered secret friends among the soldiers and non-commissioned officers at the Prison, for not a few of the baser sort were disaffected against their own superiors, and at least pretended sympathy with the Americans. On the other side laboured many more sensible men, and while each heart throbbed for the news so long withheld, law and order were re-established, and the schools, arranged for the young and ignorant, were opened again. For two years these institutions had done valuable work; it was only after the failure of the great plot to burrow out of the Prison that they became neglected.

There fell a memorable day at the year's end when news reached Prince Town that the Commissioners at Ghent had signed the Treaty of peace and that the sloop-of-war, *Favourite*, would sail immediately with the document to the United States. This occasion was seized for widespread rejoicings within the Prison, and Captain Short felt as thankful at heart as any of his charges. But while the day of thanksgiving drew to its close, the tumult in the prisons drew deafening; great masses of men stampeded from yard to yard; a mad spirit animated reckless thousands; the air grew heavily charged with human passion; and danger threatened in many shapes.

Burnham's party had obtained a quantity of gunpowder unknown to their guards, and with this they manufactured bombs which exploded with reports like cannon. Alarming rumours followed these discharges; some said efforts were being made to blow down the walls; many junior officers approached Commandant Short with fear upon their faces.

At midday a pennant was seen to flutter out above each division of the Prison, and on No. 3, styled "The Commodore," a huge white flag broke and revealed a legend printed upon it. "*Free Trade and Sailors' Rights.*" A salute of seventeen bombs accompanied this display and the riot became deafening. Far

distant upon the Moor many a traveller heard the sound, as of remote thunders grumbling under the horizon, and hastened upon his journey in dread of approaching tempest.

At the Prison, as the flags flew out, and the multitudes roared, Cecil Stark approached Burnham and prayed him to consider his position.

"You are doing a mad thing," he said. "You know as well as I that while a spark of reason lurked in efforts to escape authority, I was eager as any man. Ay, and beyond reason too, for, looking back, I see that the tunnel plot was folly. But now, to what purpose is this frantic nonsense? We shall be free men in three months. Then why make vexatious friction and lend the weight of your support to so much brainless folly?"

Burnham had been drinking and he answered fiercely.

"Cease your preaching! I calculate things are just about cooked now; and they'll have to be eaten. We know you, at any rate—ever ready to make trouble when you had no temptation to do otherwise. But now—you're an Englishman in disguise!"

"If you were not drunk, I'd thrash you before your bullies, for that insult."

"Threats—threats and big words. We know you, I say; we see through you. A place-seeker, who tried to lead that he might gratify his own cursed vanity. Now you are a pious prig and teach in the school and say your prayers, I dare say! Much good your leadership did—you with big patriotic words on your lips and an English girl in your mean heart!"

"Leave that, or I'll——"

"Do it—do it! D'you think I fear you? I'm leader now—leader of braver men than ever listened to you. Touch me, and a hundred men will break every bone in your body! A Yankee—you! I'll swear, if the truth was known, we should find you were leagued with Judas Leverett himself. Take that pill and swallow it, you canting humbug!"

Stark fell back and stared at his old companion.

"You!" he cried. "Bill Burnham to say that to me!"

He was silent and the other repeated his charge.

"I'll speak with you when you're sober then."

"And what will you say?" began the younger; but Stark turned from him; and at the same moment a peculiar whistle, used by

his gang as a signal, told Burnham that he was wanted. Captain Short, with a bodyguard of armed troops, had appeared, and he desired to speak with a representative of the prisoners.

Burnham, with Ira Anson, stepped forward, and the rest of the mischief-makers stood in a group and watched them.

"Do you speak for these troublesome men?" asked the Commandant.

"I do," answered the young American. "I lead them all; and I'll not answer for them if any attempt is made to oppress them to-day."

"At least their spokesman should not be drunk himself, whatever his rag-tag and bob-tail are. You stand condemned, for you know that liquor is forbidden."

"The lad's not drunk," said Anson; "or, if he is, it is only at the same tap as all of us: the news from Ghent."

"I'll not argue it, sir. I'm only sorry you cannot receive the news in a spirit more worthy. At least you'll oblige me by striking that flag on Prison No. 3. It is an invitation to foolish and ignorant sailors to mutiny, and I will not permit it to float here while I'm in command."

"The word 'Rights' is a red rag to your Government," said Anson insolently.

"Your rights at least have always been respected," answered Short patiently. "I wish I could help you benighted fellows to see reason and take juster views. Your conduct proceeds from hatred of us and fear of us, instead of hatred of evil and fear of God. But 'tis your nation that must answer for you. Believe me, I shall be very well pleased to wash my hands of you."

Stark approached at this moment, and Captain Short turned to him.

"You at least are intelligent; and you fought fair," said the soldier. "Now I desire that yonder flag should be hauled down. I ask politely; I sink authority and approach these foolish fellows here as man to man. One is intoxicated; the other is, unfortunately, not a gentleman. I desire that that offensive flag shall be pulled down, and since we are in the atmosphere of peace, I will hoist an American emblem at the Prison gate and let it wave beside the Union Jack."

"You are generous," declared Cecil Stark. "Nothing could be fairer."

"I say 'no,'" interposed Burnham doggedly. "My men will have their flag; and if the motto stings—let it sting."

"In that case I order all flags down," answered Short, his neck flushing crimson. "Since you are such an intractable ass, you must be driven. Let every shred of bunting be down ere the sun sets, or it shall be brought down. If you court hard knocks, you may expect them."

He turned away in a rage, and Burnham whistled "Yankee Doodle," while a few silly sailors who had overheard the conversation cheered their representatives and hissed at Cecil Stark. But later in the day Anson prevailed with his detachments, and at sunset, rather than provoke an actual struggle, the flags came down. To the end, however, they defied their guards. Captain Short himself led three hundred men with fixed bayonets, and Sergeant Bradridge, who was of the number, expected at last to hear the sound of battle. But as the red winter sun sank behind the Moor, every flag fluttered simultaneously to earth, and for that time acute danger vanished with the daylight.

Many sailors were now arriving from the British battleships. These men, on hearing of peace, claimed the rights of American citizenship, and refused longer to fight against their fellow-countrymen. Those guilty of such tergiversation met but a frosty welcome at Prince Town, and new strifes followed upon their arrival. Among these shifty mariners were six from H.M.S. *Pelican*, who had fought in the action between that vessel and the United States brig *Argus*. The crew of the captured brig had been imprisoned at Prince Town; and after the *Pelican's* men arrived, such was the bitter animosity displayed against them that they found their lives in danger. To Captain Short these people appealed for protection, and another grave collision occurred between Burnham's party and the Commandant, when a detachment of soldiers entered the War Prison and rescued the six by force of arms. Then came two more defaulters from an English ship, and as both had actually volunteered for British service from Prince Town a year before, they were received back again with universal execration. A court convened by Ira Anson sat upon these poor wretches, and while some cried for their instant death, others proposed a flogging.

It was Mr. Knapps who hit upon an agreeable punishment to meet their crime.

"Take the doodles and brand 'em," he said. "They've got the name of a British ship tattooed over their dirty hearts, for I seed it there ; now put U.S.T. on their faces, so as they'll be known evermore for United States Traitors."

The proposal was cheered and acted upon. To the hospital the sufferers went after their punishment, and Doctor Macgrath did what was possible to eradicate the damning letters ; but they had been bitten in too well. Captain Short took this matter gravely, and the men responsible for the actual assault were thrust into the cachots to stand their trial.

Another incident to illustrate the growing rancour and bitterness may be given. A prisoner—one of four unfortunates who had suffered six months in a cachot—watched his opportunity when at exercise, and escaped from his yard to the next. He was immediately surrounded by his countrymen, and when Short demanded him back, the Americans refused to give him up. Thereupon the Commandant appeared with fixed bayonets and directed all prisoners to retire into their respective quarters, that a strict search might be made for the escaped man. Burnham, however, defied this order in the name of his comrades.

"This poor devil has suffered enough," he said. "His crime, which was an alleged attempt to blow up a British schooner, was never proved against him, and we will not restore him to renewed tortures. I am master here, and we lack not for arms or skill to use them. That you will learn to your cost, if you try force against us. You forget that the war is ended now."

Captain Short perceived that with his small company he would have little chance against the threatening hordes arrayed against him ; therefore, without answering Burnham, he gave the order to retire, and left the prison amid wild and derisive shouts and cat-calls.

But albeit defeated, the Commandant took a weak man's revenge and shut up the Prison markets. Instantly Burnham and his friends issued an order that no carpenter, mason nor other mechanic should do any further work for the British Government until the markets were re-opened. This 'strike' caused such unexpected expense and inconvenience, that Captain Short was constrained to yield again. The markets were set going once more and the artificers promptly returned to their labours. Thus the prisoners achieved their ends, and Burnham,

flushed with success, continued to take the side of lawlessness ; while Short, much embittered by his reverse and uneasily conscious that his own officers were laughing at him, sank into a brooding ferocity that darkened his face and boded ill for the future.

An interval of calm succeeded ; and then fell out those tragic events that closed the history of the Prince Town War Prison.

CHAPTER IV

OUT OF NIGHT

MR. PETER NORCOT dwelt in one of the comfortable border farmhouses that lie among the foothills of Dartmoor near Chagford. It was an old Elizabethan domicile, and with it the wool-stapler owned a hundred acres of forest and three farms. His property adjoined the estates of the Manor of Godleigh; but he was not upon genial terms with the lord of the manor, one Sir Simon Yeoland. The knight had old-fashioned ideas on the subject of trade and looked down upon Peter; while Mr. Norcot for his part, held his neighbour a mere machine for slaughter of game and oppression of the common people—a bundle of hereditary and predatory instincts handed down from the dark ages.

There came a night in early spring when Peter sat beside his parlour fire, sipped his grog and read his Shakespeare. Gertrude Norcot, a faded but still handsome woman of five-and-thirty, kept him company until the clock chimed ten; then she stopped her work, kissed her brother on the temple and retired.

Mr. Norcot sat on until midnight; after which he put up a guard before the dying fire and was just about to go to bed when the flame burst out anew and he delayed and spread his hands to warm them. His thoughts were busy of late, for he matured the next attempt to win Grace Malherb. Still there was but one woman in the world for him, and his purpose towards her remained unshaken. But the task grew difficult indeed, for now Maurice Malherb was to be counted upon the side of his daughter.

Alone, without need of any mask, Peter's countenance lacked that geniality usually associated with it. To-night, in the flickering fire-gleam, he looked as though his face was carved out of

yellow ivory. It revealed stern lines such as shall be seen in the facial severity of the Red Man.

Now, upon his grim and midnight cogitations, there fell suddenly a sound. The noise of tapping reached him from the window; but supposing it to be but an ivy spray escaped from the mullion and blown against the casement by nightly winds, he paid no heed. Then the sound increased and became sharper; so Norcot knew that some wanderer stood outside and summoned him. Without hesitation he threw open the shutter, pulled up the blind and looked out, to see a man with his face close against the glass. An aged but virile countenance with brilliant eyes peered in. The man beckoned, and Peter nodded and prepared to unfasten the window. The face was not unfamiliar to him, and he puzzled to recollect the person of his visitor, but failed to do so.

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes," said Mr. Norcot to himself as the stranger entered.

"Give 'e good even. I'll speak with you if you'm alone," he began, and immediately approached the light.

"I know your face; yet I know it not. Who are you?" asked Peter.

The wanderer uttered a sound that might have indicated amusement.

"I've had a long journey and feared every moment to find my feet in a man-trap."

"That you need not have done upon my land. The gorge of humanity rises at such damnable contrivances. The ruffian Yeoland, lord of the manor, has both traps and spring-guns in his coverts—he showed them to me himself, cold-blooded devil. Yes, he exhibited them with such pride as a mother might display her first-born! Engines of hell! But they answer their purpose; he does not lose a bird now."

"Since when was you so merciful? Your words is soft—your eyes give 'em the lie."

Then Norcot, recognising his visitor, leapt from his seat and stared with real amazement. For once he was startled into an oath.

"Good God, it's Lovey Lee!"

The miser grinned.

"You was a long time finding out. Ess fay—poor old Lovey, still in the land of the living."

"But your bones were found and buried! There was a most dramatic scene, I hear. Malherb—he cried out before them all in the churchyard at Widecombe that he had slain you, that your blood was upon his head. It's eating his heart out, they say."

"Let it eat with poisoned teeth. No fault of his that I didn't die. An' I've cussed heaven for two months because the law haven't taken the man an' hanged him, as I meant it to. But yet hanging's an easier death than what he's dying."

"Alive!" said Norcot. "Alive—very much alive. And turned into a man. 'Doubtless a staunch and solid piece of framework, as any January could freeze together!' And where learnt you the trick of rising from the dead? What devil taught you that, you 'ceaseless labourer in the work of shame'?"

"If you've only got hard words——"

"Nay, nay; I love you; you are the Queen of the Moor!"

"He left me for dead, and Lord knows how long I was dead. He struck me down at dawn, and when I came to my senses, the moon was setting. I got back to my secret place somehow, and found 'twas empty. So I seed that the Devil had helped him to find his darter. Well for her he did!"

Norcot nodded.

"Not a doubt of it," he said.

"Be you still of a mind about the wench?"

He did not answer, but prepared to pour some spirits into a glass for the old woman. Lovey, however, refused them.

"Be you still of a mind? That's my question."

"Maurice Malherb has changed his views. Your death has done wonders and quite broke him. An ignoble type of man

"We call a nettle but a nettle
And the faults of fools but folly."

So Shakespeare dismisses Malherb. Now tell me about yourself; then I'll answer your question."

"Soon told. After I seed my den was found out, bad as I was, with my skull near split and scarce able to crawl, I dragged my goods away an' carried 'em—every stick—two mile off. For I knowed they'd come next day an' tear the place down an' pull all abroad, like a boy pulls out a bird's nest. I reckoned the

bloodhounds was arter me, too, and might finish me any minute ; but nought happened and I got clear off. Then 'twas that two nights after, seeking for another hiding-place where I could be safe, I comed across a corpse. Never was a stranger sight seen. A man wi' only one hand an' his throat cut from ear to ear. His eyes glared through the dim fog of death upon 'em, an' the foxes had found him. I be wearing his clothes now. They'm very comfortable, an' 'tis a wonder I never took to man's garments afore, for they'm always to be had where there's scarecrows. I needn't tell 'e the rest, for you've guessed it by 'our grinning. I seed how 'twould fall out, an' so it did. My white rags of hair I cut off an' left beside his bald poll, an' my clothes I put about his clay. His knife I took, an' what's more, I got two hundred and eight pound by him, for there was gold pieces covered with his blood ail round him. More there might have been, but the cursed greedy bogs had swallowed 'em, though I raked elbow deep for 'em. Then I smashed in the man's head an' left winter an' the crows an' wild beasts to do the rest. My locks be growing again now."

She took off her close cap of rabbit's skin and revealed a tangle of snow-white hair with evident satisfaction.

"What next?" asked Peter.

"That be all. I'm hid very snug just now, right up where the river springs nigh the Grey Wethers on Sittaford Tor. Not a bee gathers honey there ; not a beast grazes that way. An' Jack Lee be along wi' me ; for us met by chance nigh Holne Wood in the night, both hunting for food. 'Twas three days after he slipped the sojers."

"A scurvy trick he served me. I'd got her promise to marry me if I saved him."

"Well, I'll sell him to 'e if you wants to pay him out."

"A grand-dam to be proud of! And now, my old treasure, what do you come to me for?"

"First I want you to change my money into paper an' buy my snuff-boxes an' watches an' bits of plate. I be going to France."

"Going to leave us! You mustn't. We couldn't get on without you. Damme, I'm in love with you myself. There's something about those clothes——"

"Be you in love with that girl still? That's the question. If so, us may do each other a service."

"Yes, she marries me sooner or later. I never change. The good wife of Bath's motto is my own:

" 'I followeth aye mine inclination
By vertue of my constellation.'

My star is steadfastness—the fixed pole is not more stable. I'm going to marry Grace Malherb."

"You'll ne'er get her by fair means."

"In love all is fair. 'Tis strange, but your gaunt presence actually shattered thoughts of her. Things have now come to a crisis and I must use the remarkable brains that Heaven has given me. 'Nor do men light a candle and put it under a bushel.' I've tried to marry her and failed utterly to do so upon simple and conventional lines. Now I must be serious with myself. 'The Destinies find the way,' if we only let them have their heads."

He toyed with his watch-guard. The seals were fastened to a piece of black silk.

"She wore that once about her waist," he said.

"Give me but what this ribband bound;
Take all the rest the sun goes round."

"I can help you."

"It's so difficult to realise that you are alive. The countryside has quite settled it. All men believe you to be in another world. Malherb's announcement was taken with wonderful self-control. I don't want to hurt your delicate feelings, Lovey, but not a soul went into mourning. In fact, only one man in all Devon felt your taking off, and that was Maurice Malherb."

"You laugh at me. Well, here's a thing to make you laugh again. I'll tell you how to get her without any more trouble."

"I had thought perhaps to approach the parent birds once more. But what's the use? Her mother counts for nought. Her father has got his head full of his own miseries. 'Doubtful ills plague us worst,' as Seneca so justly observes. While he hesitated as to whether you were really extinct, he must have gone through hot fires. Now he knows the worst and waits to suffer for it; but, what's interesting, not a soul moves against him."

"That's where my plan comes in then. You lay a charge of murder on him, an' the maid will marry you to shut your mouth."

"Worthy of you, but foreign to my genius. Besides, though I blush to say it, everybody sympathises with him. It is always very painful to hear the estimate of our fellow-creatures upon us; but people who die and come to life again must expect to learn some particularly painful facts. There's an Eastern proverb apposite to that, 'Nobody knows how good we are except ourselves'! No; for my part, since I have this girl I must and will, I'm inclined now to take her by main force—to do something feudal and old-fashioned. Until she comes under my roof and finds all that she is losing, she will never get sense. And then—stolen fruit! Consider the charm of it to an epicure like myself."

"I'll do anything woman can do for money," answered Mrs. Lee. "My grandson an' me bide in a ruined shepherd's cot beyond Sittaford. Us have made it watertight; but 'tis plaguey cold, an' I'm sick of it. Change my money an' add a bit to it, an' I'll help 'e with that girl afore I go to France. I always knowed 'twould be my lot to help you."

"We ought to use your nephew. She would trust him."

"Ess, she do. If you want her here, Jack Lee's the properest tool to use. I can fox him with a word an' make him help us without knowing what he's doing."

"Of course—of course. I'll not insult you by planning details. The thing is obvious."

"Only one man knows where we be hidden, an' that's Leaman Cloberry. He'll help 'e. He hates Malherb, 'cause he dusted rat-catcher's mangy jacket for him long ago. 'Tis Cloberry keeps us in food; an' a cruel lot of money he makes us pay for it."

They conversed for the space of another hour; then Norcot directed the old woman to return to him in three weeks from that night, and let her out of the window.

"An' you'll give me a clear hundred over what you change for me, an' buy my trinkets?" she said.

"All that."

"An' help me to take ship at Dartmouth an' get out o' the country?"

"It is agreed."

Lovey vanished and Peter watched her. The Malherb amphora was for that moment uppermost in his mind, but he had not mentioned it for fear of alarming her. His plot was adumbrated and the details began to grow. He meant to marry Grace

after abducting her from her home ; and he designed subsequently to propitiate Malherb with the amphora.

"'Twill be a little surprise for our old lady to lose it after all," he thought.

Peter appeared at seven o'clock to take breakfast, as usual, and, as Gertrude poured out coffee, he surprised his sister with an item of intelligence.

"I go to London to-morrow," he said. "It is a bore to travel just now, but the East India Company must be obeyed."

CHAPTER V

THE LEOPARD CHANGES HER SPOTS

JOHN LEE had reached a supreme height of indifference to fortune even before his capture, condemnation and sentence. He awaited his end without concern, and only averted it at the instance of Thomas Putt. Afterwards, for mingled reasons, he carefully abstained from any intercourse with Fox Tor Farm. And thus it happened that he knew nothing of the supposed death and burial of his grandmother. The miser herself had gloated over the success of her enterprise as related by Mr. Cloberry, but Leaman was expressly directed by Lovey Lee to keep the truth a secret; and this he did, being well paid for his pains. Meantime the old woman's indignation grew that Maurice Malherb was not arrested and hanged.

"'Tis a blackguard beast of a world," she told Leaman Cloberry. "One law for rich an' one for poor; but if there's any justice left stirring in the land, us may live to see him dancing in the air outside of Exeter Gaol yet."

Now, after a period of most miserable seclusion in a shepherd's ruined cot near the secret sources of Dart, John Lee was to find himself again thrust into the affairs of Grace Malherb, and to thank God that he had been spared to do her further service.

It was not until Peter Norcot had returned from London, after a visit of three weeks' duration, that Lovey Lee opened the new project to her grandson, and then, indeed, she approached it in a fashion so remarkable that one might have been stirred to admiration.

She returned late one night to their haunt, and plunged into a startling narrative which quickly roused John Lee from sleep.

"The wickedness of this world! Oh, Jack, if ever you go out among men again, an' get safe off to America, as you hope, try an' keep straight."

He turned over in his bed of dry heath and stared while his grandmother ate her supper. Only a streak of moonlight through the roof lighted their forlorn hiding-place.

"That's strange advice from your lips," he said.

"I know I've been a bad old devil—nobody knows it better. But whose fault? The world's, not mine. An' I'm white to black compared to some of us."

"That's very comforting for you, I'll wager. But he must be a night-black colour that makes you look fair. Yet since you can mourn, 'tis well. Give back the Malherb amphora and I'll say you're the best woman in England."

"All in good time. Have you thought what that bit of glass has cost me? I can't change my god in a minute. For my god it be. But I'm minded to alter my way of living—I swear it—after what I've heard this night."

"Have you met the Devil himself then?"

"No—his right hand, Peter Norcot. I was just sitting by the wayside, full of wonder how I could get out of this evil an' clear the country, an' turn my fag end of life to good, when past he rode 'pon his great horse. 'Tis Lovey Lee!' he cries out, for his lynx eyes remembered my face, even in moonlight. And the black spleen of him! His first thought was you! He's hopeful to see you hanged yet. 'Give him up an' I'll give 'e five hunderd pound,' he said. But I ban't sunk so low as that, though by your starting you seem to think so. I said I knowed nought about 'e. 'Leave that then,' says he. 'You can help me in another job, and richly I'll reward you.'

"Then he fell to telling 'bout Malherb an' his darter. He'm set there still—the black patience of him! An' now his plan be to kindiddle her away altogether. He's plotting to get her under his own roof; and once there—oh Lord! even I—stone-hearted as I've been till now—felt my inwards trouble to hear him an' see the moonlight in his steel eyes! But I was so cunning as a viper an' promised to help him if he'd help me."

"What do you want of him?"

"He'm going to change all my gold money into paper, an' he'm going to buy my watches an' snuff-boxes an' teaspoons, as I can't take with me. Then, that done, I've promised to help with the maiden. She'm to meet him 'pon Saturday week, an' if she do, home she'll never go no more till her name be Grace Norcot."

"And you promised to help in that?"

"I didn't dare refuse; but I'm going to play him false. I've done with wickedness. These latter days have drove the fear of God into me. I wouldn't help that tiger, not for another amphora; an' I be going to prove it by taking the side of right."

"She must be warned."

"I know it; an' that's your work. Us can't go to Fox Tor Farm; but you've got to see her by hook or by crook, else 'tis all over with her."

"I might write."

"You must write. 'Tis the only way. An' since she taught 'e to write, she'll know your penmanship an' trust it. My only fear was you'd had about enough of the girl an' wouldn't care to do no more for her. But so it lies: if she's to be saved, you must do it. I'm too old and weak to do anything. Besides, I'm feared o' Norcot."

"I must see her."

"You can't—not at Fox Tor Farm. He've got his spies set as though he'd made war upon the house. His plot be deeper than the sea. Go near an' you'm a dead man, for there's money on your head. Us can only trust Leaman Cloberry to take a letter for a reward; an' since he'll be sure to read what you say, 'twill be well in the letter to do no more than ax the maid to come an' see you."

"See me!"

"Why not? She's free; you ban't. You can slip down to Cloberry's cot at Dartmeet by night, an' she can come next day an' see you there an' get her warning."

Lee nodded.

"A written word will bring her, an' Cloberry would get it to her for money. That I'll pay. He's as fond of gold as I was afore I began to get sense. I'll give Leaman ten pounds if he does what you want."

John Lee's simple heart was too concerned with Grace to reflect upon his grandmother's attitude toward this business. Full of the perils that lay in wait for her, and aware she was ignorant of them, he thanked heaven that he was still alive and possessed power to do her vital service. He did not weigh Lovey's words, but her startling news; he did not question the probable veracity of her present sentiments; but considered little more than her proposals

to assist him in a righteous cause. That he must now see Grace was clear ; and if, as had been declared, the plot against her only wanted a week for its fulfilment, the event cried for instant action. Since to approach Fox Tor Farm and pierce the cordon said to be set around was doubtless impossible, John determined to follow his grandmother's advice and write and bid Grace meet him at Leaman Cloberry's cottage. To walk or ride thither was easy for her and could rouse no suspicion. Then what he had to say might be quickly said, though it could not safely be written.

"I'll go after nightfall to-morrow," he declared.

"And bid her come to see you on Friday, be it wet or fine," answered Lovey ; "for after that date she'll be free no more. Her father's hardened his heart like Pharaoh. He'll see that she don't trick him again "

"Her father !"

"So Norcot told me—grinning like a rain-shoot. They'm both against her. 'Tis two to one ; and 'twould be three to one if I'd done what they wanted. But I couldn't. I'm weary of wickedness."

"After nightfall to-morrow, then," said the man.

Lovey spoke no more, and they retired into their respective corners of the hut ; but when, two hours later, John Lee's steady breathing told his grandmother that he was unconscious, she rose, left him asleep, and crept away into the Moor. Southward she went, and then, near the tor called Hartland, heard a voice out of the night—a cracked and ancient voice, that sang of the owner's business and repeated its refrain with the monotony of a bird.

"A ha'penny for a rook ;
A penny for a jay ;
A noble for a fox ;
An' twelvence for a gray !"

Soon Lovey found Leaman Cloberry, where he waited by appointment in a cleft of the rocks, snugly clad as usual in the raiment of dead beasts.

"'Tis all so easy as cursing," she said. "He'll come to you to-morrow—poor sheep—an' write the letter. You'll get it to her through Tom Putt, who won't know what he's doing ; an' she'll go to him Friday. Then he'll pour his nonsense into her ears ; and as she passes home, along by Whispering Wood, you

THE LEOPARD CHANGES HER SPOTS 357

an' me will be waiting for her. She'll jump for joy and fear no evil when she sees me alive ; for it means that her father's guiltless of blood."

"An' this here Mr. Norcot?" asked Cloberry. "A good friend to me an' very generous in the past ; but the money ought to be big."

"So it will be. We take the maiden by night up to where the springs of Dart break out ; an' then he comes along by chance and rescues her from us. 'Tis all planned. He'll seem in a grand rage, an' may even fetch you a blow or two ; but they'm light at fifty pounds. Then off he goes with her to Chagford, and not a living soul that cares for her will know where she be hidden till it pleases him to tell."

"An' John Lee?" inquired the vermin-catcher.

"Well—what of him? Who troubles about the cheese when the mouse is caught? He'll know nought till he hears she has been caught. And she'll always think that 'twas his treachery laid the trap for her!"

CHAPTER VI

THE BURNING OF BLAZEY

ON the fourteenth day of March, 1815, came peace, borne upon the white wings of the *Favourite* : for the President of the United States had ratified the treaty.

But, unhappily, the history of the War Prison on Dartmoor was not yet written, and the last bloody chapter still remained to tell.

Ignorant of the complicated task set for authority, the bulk of the Americans instantly clamoured to be free ; nor could the better instructed among them induce patience at this juncture. Letters from Mr. Blazezy cooled enthusiasm ; but these were written in a callous spirit, and impatience quickly rose to anger. Nothing had as yet been prepared for exodus, and the Agent not only gave no promise of immediate liberation, but explained that certain precautions, highly offensive to many of the Americans, must first be taken before a man left Dartmoor.

"I am informed," he wrote, "that great numbers of you refuse to be inoculated with the smallpox, which I hear has been very mortal among you. I therefore acquaint you that it will be impossible for me to send home any prisoners unless they have gone through the same."

Later he wrote again concerning American prisoners taken under the French flag ; and then, as no further communication was received for many days, the sailors, like schoolboys on the verge of holiday, began mischievous pranks, flouted their guards and planned all the trouble that ingenuity could devise. Many escaped, for discipline was relaxed. Then Captain Short, from carelessness, proceeded to the other extreme, until even those who desired to assist him in the maintenance of order despaired. The prisoners were out of hand, and their Commandant knew it. He blamed them, not himself, for his heart would not accuse him, though a soldier's conscience sometimes whispered censure.

One night a strange glare filled the courtyard of No. 4, and lurid lights with inky shadows leapt and fell against the granite walls. In the midst a great bonfire blazed, and round about it thousands of wild figures ran, shouted and yelled. At the grilles stood the officers of the prison, some fearful, some indifferent, some enraged.

Sergeant Bradridge, off duty, was watching this scene, and beside him stood his nephew, Mr. Putt.

"There'll be trouble yet," declared the sergeant gloomily, "for they be bent on it. They're mad at the delay, and the party for sense—Mr. Cecil Stark and a grey-head or two, and most of the other gentlemen among 'em—count for nothing."

As he spoke a procession of prisoners appeared, carrying a hurdle on which was seated the semblance of a man. The figure wore a plum-coloured coat, had a scratch wig, a three-cornered hat and knee breeches. Its face was red, its nose was scarlet, its great eyes coal-black.

"'Tis meant for Agent Blazezy," explained Putt's uncle. "They've been playing the fool with that great doll all day. First they tried it for bringing 'em to nakedness and starvation here; then they found it guilty; then they made it confess all its sins, which took a mighty long time; then they hanged it by the neck; and now they'm going to burn it to ashes. So they'd treat the real man if they could get at him. An' they'll break loose afore long, so sure at my name's Bradridge, for the Devil's in 'em."

With songs and a wild war dance the effigy of Reuben Blazezy was flung upon the flames; then, while it burned, the prisoners roared "Yankee Doodle" together until the walls vibrated.

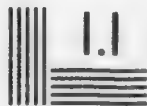
Apart among them stood Burnham, and with him was Cecil Stark. A sort of friendship still subsisted between them, for the younger man had apologised after their last quarrel as soon as he found himself sober again. Relations, however, were strained to breaking, and to-night they broke for ever.

Stark, indeed, had lost interest in everything but his own affairs now. He might have left the prison at any moment by the expedient of a bribe to the guard; but as before, the interests of the great plot had kept him, so now the welfare of the mass of prisoners held him still among them. There was little he could do, for he represented patience, which was an unpopular virtue after peace had been declared; but he saw the futility of this



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

behaviour, and tried as far as possible to make his fellows reasonable. A few begged him to remain to the end, and, knowing from letters pretty regularly received through Putt, that all was well with Grace, he waited on.

His future line of action was difficult, but he had determined upon it. Grace gave him to understand that Norcot troubled her no more, and that her father, stricken by a terrible grief, was changed and took a gentler view of life's many-sided problems. Therefore, he proposed to return to Fox Tor Farm and attempt a reconciliation between himself and the Malherbs. Great personal circumstances armed him with strong arguments from a worldly point of view, for his uncle in Vermont was dead, and he now stood heir to a notable fortune.

"I wish to God 'twas the living man that roasted there!" cried Burnham, pointing to the bonfire. "Of all devilish things in this war, our treatment after peace is declared has been the most devilish. 'Tis two weeks since we should have been set free, yet here we still are."

"But they are active. Three ships have set sail from London for Plymouth."

"D'you believe that yarn? Ask the soldiers and they'll tell you the ships are held in the Downs by contrary winds; then they turn aside and wink at each other."

"You take the conduct of these hirelings too seriously. It is folly to let the vulgarity of turnkeys and guards anger you, or to answer the indifference of the authorities with this buffoonery."

He pointed to the bonfire.

"You're a prig," said the other. "You can't help it, but an infernal prig are you, Cecil Stark; and now every word you speak shows that you've changed sides and are only an American in name."

"Bad company has demoralised a good fellow," answered the other. "You want the discipline of a ship-of-war and a whiff of salt air to make you your own man again, Burnham. You pretend it is a fine thing to lead these ignorant, silly fellows; but in your heart you are ashamed, and that makes you break with an old friend. 'Tis the same with Captain Short. He's been weak in the past, and the weakest thing about him is that now he's looking for gratitude for his former good nature. Gratitude's the rare virtue of individuals—never of a mob."

"You prose and prose and blink at facts, like an owl blinks at daylight. Why don't you escape and get out of it?"

"Because I reckon I'm more use here."

"I know better; you're frightened to do it. If you had the pluck of a powder-monkey, and if your love for that girl over there was worth a damn, you'd have vanished long ago; but you know this cursed Government is letting us escape now, so that we may fall into the hands of the press-gangs that are hunting all round Dartmoor like packs of wolves—you know that, and you're frightened they'll catch you too. Nothing makes a man such a coward as coming into a fortune."

"See him—see him!" shouted Mr. Cuffee, who ran by at this moment. "See him fizzle, gemmen! Marse Blaze blaze—him blaze—him blaze like dat in hell!"

He rushed screaming past with the other black men, whose rags, gleaming teeth and ferocious faces, suggested the demon throng proper to Mr. Blaze's future environment.

"You will pick a quarrel, drunk or sober," said Stark, "though of late you've sunk to be not worth kicking. As you like—but even at the risk of more nonsense from you, I'd wish to explain that I'm no Englishman, though it happens I'm not mad. Consider how this nation stands. Hardly has it concluded peace with us than comes the news that Bonaparte has left Elba, and is now in Europe at the head of three hundred thousand men."

"Don't I know it? Doesn't every cur among them turn pale and look over his shoulder like a frightened woman when you cry 'Boney is coming'?"

"They are busy and rather preoccupied. I had speech with Short yesterday."

"What do I care with whom you had speech? I'm here for nearly six thousand free men, who are shut up and still treated as prisoners. Let them see to that. We want our liberty, and we'll take it before many days are done. What do you suppose we are made of?"

"The Lord knows," said Stark. "You are men no more, but a horde of savage and silly monkeys. How can they get ships to convey six thousand of us to America in a week? You, at least, who pretend to some knowledge of warfare and seamanship, should have patience and do your small part to help the British Government, not hinder it."

"I'm not an Englishman."

"I wish you were. Unfortunately the fact remains that you're an American; but your country's not likely to be proud of you if ever this chapter in your career is written."

At this moment, as the ashes of Blazey sank into one glowing mass, and the bonfire slowly died, the Americans burst into a mournful dirge that had been written by Ira Anson the day before, and committed to memory by a hundred men.

Stark left his old shipmate, not guessing that he would never speak to him again; but he had caught sight of Putt with some soldiers near the grille, and now he approached. They strolled on different sides of the barrier into a dark corner under shadow of a cachot wall. Then Putt spoke.

"A letter, your honour, an' I think 'tis important, for Miss sent it by one of our women with urgent orders to get it to you before to-morrow."

"Wait here," answered the other, and, taking the note, he returned within the light of the waning fire and read it.

"Dear heart," wrote Grace. "Yesterday through a villager I had a line from John Lee. He is near us, and I fear that he has heard of evil. He sends but two lines: 'Meet me after noon to-morrow at Leaman Cloberry's cot, where I shall lie hid till you come. I must see you. Danger. John Lee.' I am going. It is his writing, therefore I fear nothing. When are you coming to me? The time of waiting is endless to your Grace."

Stark reflected rapidly. That Lee should not approach him was easily understood; yet that some new danger threatened and John had wind of it, filled him with alarm. He returned to Putt, but made no mention of the letter, for Thomas was in ignorance of all matters between Grace and the prisoner. He glorified in his secret duties as messenger, and in the substantial payment they received; but of John Lee he knew nothing, and Stark, guessing at Lee's personal dangers, did not increase them by whispering of his presence, even to his most faithful friend. He wrote a few words on a leaf from his pocket-book. "My life, trust him, of course; and write to me to-morrow what he tells you. Within a week, if all be well, I may reach Fox Tor Farm; but, if necessary, I can be there to-morrow. C."

"I be going to take supper with the soldiers an' my uncle,"

THE BURNING OF BLAZEY

363

said Mr. Putt; "but I'll see Miss Grace gets this first thing in the morning. Mrs. Beer will hand it to her at daylight."

The fire was nearly out now, and the great courts deserted. Soon lights streamed from the windows of the prison; then they too disappeared. Silence fell at last. Under night, in their long rows of hammocks, men slept, or tossed and swore; while beneath the stars, the sentries stood like ghosts upon the walls, or tramped backwards and forwards within them.

CHAPTER VII

DEATH AT THE GATE

FATE, ordering that the War Prison should be for ever remembered in the annals of Prince Town, now crowned all horrors of the past with a supreme catastrophe before those gloomy haunts of sorrow were deserted and echo reigned alone in their courts and corridors. An accident fostered the turbulent spirit that still animated these great companies, and daily infected the minds of new subjects, even as smallpox gained power over their bodies. Mr. Blazey thought it best to take no notice of the insult to which he had been subjected, and soon after the event wrote to his fellow-citizens in an amicable spirit. He explained that to grant passports must not be expected save by those who had friends and connections in England. For the rest, he assured the prisoners that all possible despatch marked the preparation of the cartel ships. "You are much wanted in the United States," he wrote, "and the encouragement for seamen there is very great."

The message soothed not a few impatient hearts, and many of the wiser sailors used it to good purpose in allaying the prevalent bitterness and disorder. But close upon it fell out an unfortunate occurrence for which the prison contractors were responsible. During a whole day the prisoners remained short of bread, and they were called upon to subsist as best they might on four and a half ounces of beef to each man. Captain Short was away at the critical moment upon business in Plymouth, and his subordinates refused to oblige the hungry hordes. A pound and a half of soft bread by right belonged to every prisoner, but the contractor's clerk lost his presence of mind and refused to serve rations of any sort until the return of the Commandant.

This accident was enough for William Burnham's hot-headed

faction. A bread riot became imminent, and the prisoners threatened to force the prisons and break open the store-house. Panic and terror swept through Prince Town; chaos fell upon the gaol, and from all the surrounding neighbourhood the women and children fled into the villages, for it was reported that the prisoners were about to break loose and pour, like an angry sea, over the countryside. Many, indeed, escaped before Captain Short returned with a reinforcement of two hundred soldiers from Plymouth; but in the meanwhile fresh supplies of bread had reached the prison, and the bulk of the Americans, having no desire to brave the unknown while liberty promised to be but a thing of days, remained quiet and orderly. Their numbers acted as a weight to render the more daring inert; the disturbance passed and the Commandant expressed a frank and courteous regret for the occasion of the trouble.

Yet alarm did not subside so quickly without the prison walls. Rumours daily gained ground that the Americans contemplated a desperate deed, and Captain Short began to credit these reports. His suspicions and the folly of those in his charge precipitated a conflict, and the innocent suffered for the guilty.

Upon the 6th day of April, towards a peaceful Spring twilight, a large body of men, under Burnham's leadership, collected by twos and threes in one place. The numbers increased, and began ominously to swarm round about a great gate that led from the exercise yards to the marketplace. Ordered by the turnkeys to disperse, they refused; implored by some of their friends to avoid risk of suspicion, Burnham himself bade these peace-seekers go their way or join the party for freedom.

A subaltern, hearing the words, hastened to Captain Short.

"There's trouble brewing, sir. They're swarming like bees at No. 1 gate from the yard, and it's only secured against 'em with a chain. There's a breach, too, in the prison wall of No. 6. The guards are frightened, and the turnkeys won't face the prisoners. I fear that they only wait for darkness."

He came in an evil hour, because the Commandant had already heard warnings of like character from one or two of the Americans themselves. For their information they had received their liberty.

Short started up.

"The dogs! Will nothing satisfy 'em? Must it come to

bayonets? Then, by God, it shall! I've done all living man can do to tame these chattering hyenas. I've endured enough to make me stand self-condemned for a poltroon. More I'll not endure. They are not to be tamed by kindness. The whip, then!"

He raged and ordered that the alarm bells should be rung immediately.

A brazen clangour echoed and re-echoed through Prince Town: the walls of the prison flung it to the mountain-tops, and the great towers resounded it, until, sunk to a mellow murmur, the bells were heard afar off. Upon their clash followed the rattle and hubbub of drums, for a tattoo broke out and beat the guard to quarters. No more unfortunate act could have marked the moment. Thousands of prisoners, just then turning in to their evening meal, rushed back to the yards, and the group at the gate became a centre of theatrical attraction. Upon one side of them advanced the Commandant, his officers and the bulk of the garrison; on the other their inquisitive and excited compatriots began to crowd. The mass was augmented from the rear until it became a moving force, impelled forward and powerless to take action against itself. Thus, when bayonets were lowered, the unfortunate van of this great movement found itself pushed remorselessly upon them.

Captain Short, taking sole command at the fatal moment, when his own self-command had vanished, drew up his force in position to charge. Simultaneously a crash above the hubbub told that the great chain at the gate was broken, and a hundred voices were lifted to cheer Mr. Knapps, whose powerful arm, wielding a sledge, had done the deed. Until now it is certain that any design of escaping had but actuated a handful of the prisoners. No concerted enterprise existed among them; but as the barrier fell and the gate yawned open, others, seeing the opportunity, crowded among Burnham's faction, and prepared to break out under the eyes of their guardians. Captain Short understood nothing more than what he saw, and the immediate danger cooled his passion. But his hatred of this many-headed monster was not cooled. Cries resounded, and behind the breaking gates the civil guards were flying. Yet to the Commandant's credit it may be recorded that he addressed the prisoners and called upon them to yield and fall back. Only yells and laughter greeted

him; while at the portals themselves an energetic handful were already forcing the great gates off their hinges.

Thereon the Commandant ordered fifteen file of the guard to this barrier, and with lowered bayonets the men advanced. Many fell back; many were driven on with curses and sharp wounds; but the inert mass behind yielded slowly, while the phalanx in front refused to yield. They kept their ground and held the gate. They insulted the soldiers, and even dared Short to fire upon them.

The first use of that awful word was in Burnham's mouth.

"We are free men!" he shouted: "and you have no jurisdiction upon us, and no right to lift these bars between us and liberty. You might as soon dare to fire upon us as order us to bide here. This night we take our liberty, since you abuse your trust and deny it to us in a country that is at peace with ours."

The mass who heard yelled and pressed forward; those who heard not answered the yell, and guessing nothing of the bayonets in front, fought to get there.

Short answered Burnham.

"Before God, they shall fire if——"

But his troops, now maddened with anger, and sore buffeted by the foremost of the prisoners, heard the word "fire," and waited for no context.

A crash and a vibrating roar followed, and Short's sentence was never spoken. Into the waning light flashed the muskets, and with the billowy smoke there rolled aloft a shriek of fear and of agony where souls parted from life.

William Burnham fell shot through the head, and several perished with him. About fifty men were wounded, and the great yard ran blood. Many of the soldiers had fired reluctantly and discharged their weapons over the heads of the prisoners; but the cry of "Blank cartridge!" lifted in the rear had no power to stay the awful panic that followed. A bellow went up from thousands of throats, and the masses of men fell back and poured like rivers into the gaols. It was then that certain knaves among the soldiery, themselves secure on the wall of the prison, opened a cross fire and slew not a few innocent men as they fled to safety. None was brought to justice for this damnable deed, because not one criminal could be discovered when the catastrophe was investigated.

Chaos indescribable ruled that hour. Short toiled like a madman to stay the mischief. He stood before his own men and yelled himself hoarse with execration and command. But the soldiers were out of hand. They had suffered much, and in their base minds the hour of vengeance was come.

At length non-commissioned officers succeeded where their superiors had failed. Sergeant Bradridge and others drew off the garrison, and Doctor Macgrath, with his orderlies and many recruits, hastened to the dead and dying. Not a few had already perished; others were mortally wounded.

Recognising Cecil Stark, the doctor approached where he knelt beside his old messmate; but a glance sufficed.

"That man is dead," he said, and hastened on to tend the living.

Those few of this vast host with whom we have been concerned had all gathered here. Knapps was down with a ball in his leg and a bayonet wound in the arm. Mr. Cuffee, uninjured, howled with sorrow beside one Haywood, a black from Virginia, who had perished. The air stank with the smells of blood and smoke. Voices and cries rang in it; deep groans, like the bass of an organ, persisted beneath the high-pitched cries. As the doctors turned or moved a sufferer, some, restored to consciousness, shrieked till the walls rang out their exquisite grief; others sighed and died under the gentle hands now stretching out to succour them. Captain Short had withdrawn his men, and nearly all the Americans were finally driven back to their respective prisons and locked in; but the Commandant and his officers laboured among the wounded and toiled on under torchlight until the last fallen sufferer had been moved to the hospital or dead-house. Seven ultimately deceased, and of those who recovered many lost a limb. The Americans first responsible for the catastrophe nearly all suffered. They were standing beside Burnham and received a point-blank fire.

After the prisoners had been removed, Cecil Stark, who worked with the English to aid them, prepared to return to his quarters when he found himself accosted by a man with a swarthy face and a black beard. Many Hebrew merchants from the surrounding towns swarmed about the prison with garments to sell to the prisoners at this season, and Stark, supposing the man to be a

Jew who had entered with hundreds of others after the catastrophe, was turning from him, when the stranger spoke.

"A moment," he said. "'Tis a terrible hour in which I'm come; but this ill wind will blow you good luck and perchance one who's more to you than yourself."

"John Lee!"

"Ay!—I've come, for there was none else that I dared to send. Evil has fallen out to Grace Malherb. This time there must be nothing to keep you from her, or else the worst will happen. Even as it is you may be too late."

"She sent your letter and I told her to fall in with any plan or warning that you might have for her."

"Take this," said Lee, producing a handful of something dark. "'Tis a beard made of sheep's wool. Wondering as I came how I should hide my face, I saw a black sheep. For once 'twas not a sign of ill-luck, but good. I cornered her, threw her, and cut from her back enough wool for the purpose. I browned my face by rubbing peat upon it. Now I am a Jew. Don this quickly and follow the crowd that is now being thrust outside the walls. The rest you shall know as we go on our way."

Stark adjusted the crisp wool about his chin, drew his hat over his eyes, fetched the cloak about him, and passed unchallenged out beside John Lee. It seemed the most natural and simple matter thus to depart. The long months of suffering, the privations, plots, excitements and disappointments did not return to his mind for many a day. Henceforth, one solitary thought informed him, and he hastened straightway forward into a trap more cunning than any made with granite.

Lee explained what had happened as far as he knew it.

"To me she came two days ago in answer to my urgent message. I had heard that Norcot meant to get her into his personal power at any cost, for he told my grandmother that he would do so. Weary of evil, or pretending so, the old woman confessed to me, and I explained to Grace Malherb the threatened danger. She promised that she would not stir abroad again, and assured me that her father knew nothing. She could hardly stop for joy when she heard that Lovey Lee was alive; for it seems that Mr. Malherb, who struck her down upon Cater's Beam, believed that he had slain her."

"But of Miss Malherb?"

"She left me and has not since been seen. This I have heard to-day, for as my grandmother did not return, I grew fearful and last night got to Fox Tor Farm. It was easy to lie in wait until I could speak with Putt, for once more the place is disturbed and they seek high and low for Miss Grace."

"You saved her from Norcot then, and some other ill has overtaken her?"

"I do not know. It may be that in ignorance I only worked for Norcot. I cannot question my grandmother, since she is still absent from our hiding-place. Therefore, there was no course but to come to you."

"Norcot may have used you after all through your grandmother?"

"I can only fear it."

"Then to him! I will not sleep until I have met that man."

"We are going there now. To-night you shall lie hid close to Chagford, and to-morrow night—not sooner—you can tackle him. I've been to Chagford, but I dared not go to him myself until I had been to you, for his answer would be to arrest me. You've got to show your quality now. If my grandmother is guilty of this, you'll find the cleverest man and the wickedest woman on Dartmoor against you."

Stark did not answer. His thoughts wandered backwards as it seemed.

"Seven there were, and now—Miller, Burnham, Carberry—all dead. And Leverett in the hand of God, if still he lives. And Jim Knapps badly wounded. That leaves but poor Cuffee and me."

"To-night you'd better lie in my den. If my grandmother has returned to it, you can tackle her; but indeed I fear you'll see her no more. Norcot was to turn her gold and trinkets into paper money. Then she meant to go to France."

"Why wait till to-morrow? Why not to-night?"

"I cannot get there, Mr. Stark. I've walked forty miles and more to-day. Five yet lie before us, and that will settle me. Food's been scarce, too, of late. I'm not in good fighting trim, I fear."

Stark seized his hand.

"By God! you've done your share! Put your troubles are near over. You come with me to Vermont, or I'll not go. I've

worn to myself that you come. I don't leave this country without you."

"You are very generous and good."

They tramped over the night-hidden land in silence. Twice Lee had to stop and rest awhile. Then he walked forward. Before midnight they reached the ruined cot under Sittaford Tor. Plenty of food was hidden there, and both ate heartily, drank from a rivulet at hand, and then slept side by side.

The place was empty, for Lovey Lee had not returned to it; but before dawn the old woman, like an aged tigress, came slinking back. Upon entering the cot and striking a light, she saw not only her grandson, but the pale upturned face of Cecil Stark.

Neither moved in their profound slumber; but the woman instantly extinguished her taper, and crept out of doors again.

"It's a hell of a tramp to take twice in one night," she thought. "Yet 'tis good for another clear hundred, and Norcot shan't hear it for less."

Then she set her old bones creaking again upon the way to Chagford.

CHAPTER VIII

BEARDING THE LION

TO Maurice Malherb it seemed that he was living his life over again. Upon the second disappearance of his daughter, the old turmoil recurred ; but less fury marked his manners and more method. Grace had gone for a long tramp over the Moor, and had never returned home. She set out after her mid-day meal and was no more seen. Neither had any man nor woman heard of her. Tom Putt, indeed, remembered the letter that he had conveyed to her through Mr. Cloberry ; but he also knew this missive came from John Lee. Therefore he felt no alarm, but doubted not that John was working with Cecil Stark, and that Grace was safe.

When the catastrophe at Prince Town became known and it transpired that not a few besides Stark were reported missing, the Americans declared their compatriots were fallen in the struggle and had been hastily buried by night, that the numbers of the slain might not challenge too much attention : but the history of the time may be relied upon in this matter, and it is safe to assume that those unaccounted for upon that unhappy night escaped in the subsequent confusion, even as Cecil Stark had done.

So, at least, concluded Maurice Malherb ; and, awake to the significance of the incident in connection with his daughter's disappearance, he was first minded to yield and let her have her way ; but then he came back to himself, and fury awoke him, and he sought Peter Norcot, that the wool-stapler might assist him to recover his daughter.

Malherb rode over the Moor to Chagford upon the morning after the tragedy at Prince Town ; and on his way he reflected concerning his own peculiar position.

It was now generally known that in a fit of rage he had slain an ancient woman upon Cater's Beam. But since the attributes of Lovey Lee and her history came also to be apprehended; so soon as it was understood that Lovey had plotted with the American prisoners and herself was hiding from a rope when Malherb destroyed her, no further concern in the matter touched men's minds. The times were troublous; there was much to think of; none made it his business to take action, and Malherb's only punishment lay within his own heart and brain.

His personal grief did not lessen; his wife alone knew of the tortures that he still suffered. His physical health began to break under the strain, for the man's old zest in food departed; his zest in sport was dead; and his zest in life and the work of life had wholly vanished. Remorse ate him alive.

To Chagford he came, and Gertrude Norcot, who had not seen him for many days, started to find the master of Fox Tor Farm much changed. His demeanour had altered; his carriage had grown humble; his head had sunk forward under the blows of time. Native pugnacity had given place to melancholy; even the incisive and stern methods of his speech were merged into a hollow and phlegmatic indifference, as of one careless of affairs.

Yet to-day he was sufficiently himself to be eager, and even passionate, as he recounted events.

"Peter has heard all," said Miss Norcot. "He has not been idle. Indeed, for three days he has lived in the saddle. Certainly we have seen very little indeed of him here."

"Your daughter must have a strange disposition," said a weak voice; and, turning round, Malherb saw a little clergyman, who held out his hand. He was flat-faced, meek and humble.

"Our kinsman, Mr. Relton Norcot," said the lady. "Peter had occasion to go to London recently, and on his way back through Exeter he picked up Relton. My cousin stands in need of rest, for he works too hard."

"It is the duty of man to toil," said the minister. "What is life without work? A formless void."

"And where is Peter now?" inquired Malherb.

"Heaven knows," answered Gertrude. "He may return to dinner, or he may not do so. Will you stay with us for the night?"

"No, no ; I must home to my wife. I am sorry to miss him. Let him know that Cecil Stark has escaped from the War Prison. This will quicken his wits as it has quickened mine. I have watchers set round about Holne. And also at Dartmouth. And yet there is that in me which begets a great indifference now. It is vain to fight the young, for Time is on their side."

"You must be brave, dear Mr. Malherb."

Miss Norcot put a light hand upon his arm.

"You can touch me," he said, "knowing what you know?"

"Indeed, yes. You have atoned."

He shook his head, and the clergyman spoke.

"Who shall fling the first stone, my dear sir? Who shall hale you before your outraged country?"

Malherb stared at him, as a man who sees an unpleasant insect suddenly where before there was none. Then his expression changed.

"You say well. Who shall? There is but one man. His duty it is, and he hangs back."

Miss Norcot was much interested.

"You mean her grandson? But he cannot, dear Mr. Malherb, for he, too, stands in danger of the law. He ought to have been hung long ago."

"I mean Maurice Malherb," he said, speaking to himself rather than to her. "Farewell. Tell Peter that I have been here. If he learns anything of comfort, let him hasten to us at Fox Tor Farm."

"Be of good cheer," said the clergyman ; but Malherb did not answer. He departed and left them whispering together.

Hardly had his horse gone out of the courtyard when Peter appeared. He had been above, in his bedchamber.

"You have made your sister say the thing which was not, my dear Peter," said the clergyman mournfully.

"Pardon me," she answered. "I did nothing of the sort. He asked where my brother was, and I said that Heaven knew. That was not to say I did not know."

They fell to talking, and Maurice Malherb went slowly towards Chagford. For a moment he stopped at Norcot's place of business beside Teign river, and asked if Peter was there ; but a doorkeeper shook his head, and the master went on his way to

the "Three Crowns," that he might bait his horse before returning home.

And as he passed the great manufactory, Maurice Malherb had been within twenty yards of his daughter; for there she was hidden; there, where hundreds of busy men and women circled round about her and the roar of water-wheels and the hum of looms made the grand music of industry from dawn till eve, Grace Malherb was securely shut up in Norcot's private rooms. Two apartments had been prepared for her, and Peter's sister visited the girl every night after dark. The full extent of her brother's purpose Gertrude only suspected when he returned from London and brought the Rev. Relton Norcot along with him; but how Peter proposed to compass the marriage his sister had not yet comprehended. Her sympathies were with him, however, and she was true and trustworthy. She guessed which way things were tending. She understood now that Peter's sole reason for going to London was that he might procure a Special License of marriage; and she knew that he had got it. Gertrude doubted not that days—perhaps hours—would bring the sequel; and nightly she exhausted her powers of persuasion upon Grace from eleven o'clock until one, in the silent factory; but as yet the captive showed no signs of being tamed. Norcot had also striven with her, and now she was a chained fury, so that Peter told his sister frankly that he went in fear of his eyes. Even his equanimity had given out, and he was casting round to know by what channel the ceremony might be celebrated as quickly as possible. But no course of action appeared until the night before Malherb's visit. Then Lovey Lee had brought her news out of the cottage on Sittaford's side, and, from that moment, Peter began to see light. Long ago he had asked himself whether Cecil Stark could be made of any service in the great matter of Grace; and now, when he learned that the American was almost at his door, Peter's spidery instincts served him well. While yet he waited, confident of the speedy advent of Stark, the future began to unfold, and a project as extraordinary as it was difficult matured in the merchant's brains.

"An enterprise involving violent melodrama, no doubt," he told himself, "but then these are melodramatic times, and in the rush and hurry of wars, and rumours of wars—in the scare of Bonaparte and the tragedy over the hills at Prince Town, a little

lawlessness must pass unnoticed. Tut, tut! Does not the world still think that fool at Fox Tor Farm a murderer? Yet no hand is lifted against him. And there is a source of strength there; for when we tell him that he is innocent of blood, he'll be so overjoyed that he'll forgive anything and anybody. And she—once married all must right itself. Let it work then. Come, Mr. Cecil Stark of Vermont! I'm nearly ready for you; indeed, 'tis perfectly plain that I can't get on much further without you. But pray God Malherb don't run upon him riding home! Yet 'tis improbable, for he'll hardly stir till nightfall. Then the man Lee will bring him hither. And now to see my lady. Here's news indeed for her."

All that afternoon Norcot was closeted with Grace, and when he left her, she let him kiss her!

"May the night bring him," she said, "for each moment is a century when I think of my dear ones at home and all their sufferings now."

And that night Cecil Stark arrived. As a fugitive himself, liable to be recaptured and returned to Prince Town by any man eager to earn three pounds, the young sailor exercised caution; and for the sake of his guide it was also necessary that he should incur no risk; but ere midnight he came, and Norcot himself ushered him into the house.

"A hearty welcome!" he said, with the most genial handgrip. "I expected you. Had you not escaped yesterday, I was coming to Prince Town to see Short and go bail for you; but love has a thousand wings and a thousand voices. Come in, Mr. Stark. Henceforth you are my guest."

He offered his hand, but the other did not take it.

"One word, sir. Is Miss Malherb here?"

"Come in, come in. You gladden my heart; for Heaven can bear witness that I took to you from the first moment ever I saw you—when you came so near to braining that beautiful lady. I'm 'a beast of company but not of the herd,' as Plutarch says. Give me a friend or two, not a regiment of 'em. There was that in your face—

"'Born to command, to conquer and to spare;
As mercy mild, yet terrible as war.'

Come in."

"'Wolves do change their hair, but not their hearts'!

There's a quotation for yours," said Stark suddenly and bluntly.

Mr. Norcot started.

"Tut, tut! I thought we were old friends."

"Answer me. Is Miss Malherb here?"

"Here, yet not here," replied Peter, pressing his breast.

"Smiling then Love took his dart
And drew her picture on my heart."

But I can relieve your mind. The maiden is well and exceedingly happy."

"Then was John Lee right; you abducted her."

"Ah! that agile lad! Mercury's a fool to him."

Stark took off his hat and entered the house.

"I am here to escort Miss Malherb to her parents, Mr. Norcot."

"And a pleasant enough task too—for both of you. Now enter and rest your weary limbs—nay; don't look suspicious. There's no mystery here—merely the library of a very busy man."

Stark sat down and rubbed a wounded foot, while Mr. Norcot regarded him with a very whimsical expression.

"So you are a new Quixote, come to rescue distressed maidens? Yet, if you could see the joy on Grace Malherb's countenance at this moment, you might suspect that your disinterested labour was in vain, Mr. Stark."

"Only her own assurances will satisfy me. As for you, in the past I owe you much, Mr. Norcot. With a single-hearted generosity that I cannot sufficiently admire and I cannot quite understand, you exerted yourself on behalf of strangers and captives. But now——"

"Now, perhaps, I am doing the same thing again, Mr. Stark. Would it surprise you to hear that within this month I have been to London on your behalf?"

"Why should you do so?"

"Ah!—my modesty refuses to reply. But believe the fact: for you and Grace Malherb I have been as industrious as a man can be. She knows and blesses me. You have yet to know."

"Is this true, sir?"

"Why not? And yet against one of your credulous character a lie would be a good weapon."

"Yes, for a slave to use," said Stark.

"It's a nice point. I'm a casuist, you know. I could mention a few classical lies that have helped to make the world what it is to-day—

" 'Why should not conscience have vacation
As well as other courts o' the nation?'"

"You jest to ask such a question, or you mistake me, Mr. Norcot."

"Tis easy to understand how willingly men would give their monitor a life-long holiday if they could. Yet, 'He that sins against his conscience sins with a witness.' Fuller. That inimitable man! I wish my young clerical cousin had something of his sublime sense and understanding. But Relton's a good lad, and no bishop can marry you tighter."

"Be frank, Mr. Norcot," said Stark. "Here am I, and I trust you. I accept your word that Miss Malherb is also here, and that she is well. But I am determined to take her back to her father and mother, because I learn that they are ignorant of her safety, and are suffering much, as it is natural they should suffer."

Peter beamed upon his visitor.

"How fresh and green you are in this old world! Now I understand why your plots miscarried and you failed of your heroic enterprises, Cecil Stark. Think you that if I'd been rogue enough to bear off this maid for selfish ends, I should welcome you so warmly and prepare so frankly to tell you the truth? Suppose—as doubtless you do suppose—that I had Miss Grace here, and my parson cousin here, and my Special License to marry her here, should I make you a welcome and honoured guest? What was your plan of action then? Do reveal it. As a student of character I should like to know."

"I trusted to right and honour, and still do so."

"Yet you'd have cut but a poor figure if I had proved that wolf-hearted wool-dealer you so rudely described."

"I judged from what John Lee told me. Your passion for Grace Malherb and your determination to marry her are widely known."

"Well, granted; but first John Lee. Have a care there. He's malignant and dangerous. Powerless himself, he would leave no stone unturned to do me a hurt—or you a hurt. Yet all that ever I did was to try and save his neck. Remember his granddam."

"I believe him to be honest."

"I know him to be a very silly rascal. He has much endangered Miss Malherb's happiness. 'A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back'; but better still, a bullet for the fool's head. The fools—the fools—they make nearly all the trouble in the world."

"Lee is a good man and no fool, if I am any judge. At least, he seems shrewd enough to me. He has served both his mistress and me nobly before to-day. He correctly guessed all along where Miss Malherb was now, and he brought me to you."

"Because 'twas his own folly helped to bring her here. We may use a fool in the affairs of life; and often there's no better tool. But be careful that no inkling of your ends is trusted to the fool."

Cecil Stark seemed to see a sinister personal significance in this speech. He regarded Norcot's smiling countenance with the closest attention.

"I might take that hint to myself," he said.

"You might; but you would be wrong and ungenerous if you did," answered the other. "I'm your friend, and I'm going to prove it under the hand and seal of a greater than either of us."

"Her own?"

"Alas! no. I'm coming to that. If she could have written, she would have done so. But for the moment it is unhappily impossible. She desired a thousand messages, but these I would not bring, because I could only give my word that they were true. But the written word is none the less convincing."

"Begin at the beginning if you are being honest with me," said Stark.

"I would say with the man in the play—

" 'A sudden thought strikes me,
Let us swear an eternal friendship' ;

but, under the circumstances, I'll leave that quotation for you. When you hear what I've got to say, you'll make it, if you're as just and honourable as I believe."

"Speak then."

Peter looked at the clock over the mantelpiece.

"Like a sermon, what I have to say must be set forth under three heads. The application I shall leave with you," he answered.

"First, however, here's a glass of wine. Allow me to drink before you do so. You would not be iustified in trusting me until you have heard more."

Mr. Norcot poured out two glasses of port, sipped his own and began his explanations.

nk before
until you
his own

CHAPTER IX

A SPECIAL LICENSE

"WE must deal," said Norcot, "with the relations of four people each to the others. And first let us examine my relations with Grace Malherb. I loved her; I loved her with a whole-hearted, true and deep love that can only find the faintest echo in poetry. Herrick's 'To Anthea, who may command him anything,' comes closest to the real sentiment. But love grows sick like an ill-grown tree, if it grows one-sided. A dark hour struck when with acute sorrow and grief I discovered that I could never win Grace's heart. The bitter truth was stamped into my soul. She would never love me; she risked her life to escape from me; frankly, I was odious to her. Yet I had observed that this emotion of loathing was not always excited in the female heart by my presence. I was blessed, even in the moment of desolation, by discovering that I was loved by another woman.

" 'Who'er she be,
That not impossible She
That shall command my heart and me'

does not matter. Suffice it that she exists; and she is beautiful and virtuous.

"As a matter of fact, I had given up all thought of marrying when once I discovered that Grace Malherb could never love me. I had faced the existence of a bachelor with an indifference bred from disappointment. I had said with Shakespeare—

" 'The sweet embraces of a loving wife
Loaden with kisses, arm'd with thousand Cupids,
Shall never clasp our necks.'

But now I think otherwise. To put it conventionally, I am consoled. You will, I know, express your gratification at this, even

as Grace did. She kissed me and enjoyed doing it! Think of that! What a piece of work is the feminine throne of the emotions!--eh? She kissed me and wished me abundant blessings--only yesterday.

'Tis done; I yield; adieu, thou cruel fair!
 Adieu, th' averted face, th' ungracious cheek!
 From thee I fly to end my grief and care,
 To hang--To hang?--yes, round another's neck!

So I made light of the matter, and now leave it for ever.

"You ask what next? Next comes Grace's relation to you. I knew that she loved you with all her heart and soul. For you she suffered the cruel indignities of the past; for you she starved; for you she fled and risked her life rather than marry me. Her father was the sole obstacle between you when I dropped out and came over to your side. He is both hard and senseless--a difficult type of man. One must not say 'by your leave' to such as he, because to ask is to be refused. So I propose to take without asking, and allow him to digest facts only after the occurrence. He is dangerous now, and those who fear all strike at all. Yet we've more than one surprise in store for Malherb. Is it nothing to think yourself a murderer and find yourself innocent? That's the trump card! There'll be little room for anger in his bosom on the day when he learns that.

"Well, I'm working without him--for love of his daughter. 'Tis settled betwixt you that you must marry though the heavens fall. You shall. I'm as set on it as either of you. The day after to-morrow you are man and wife. So much good news will bewilder you; but there's bad to go as a tonic with it. You naturally ask why these great matters do not come to you under Grace's own hand and seal. Alas! she is blind!"

"Good God! My Grace!"

"Be patient. The fault was entirely mine. Those appointed to bring her hither at any cost, discovered that she was young and strong and valiant. An old man and an old woman, albeit tough enough, found it as much as they could do, and before they had prevailed and hidden her in the depths of an ancient wood, all three were scratched and wounded with the briars and brambles, in which they had struggled. She fought with true Malherb spirit, but the conquerors came best off; Miss Malherb was torn, and badly torn, across the face. I have had

the first advice both from Plymouth and from Exeter. For the present she lives in a dead darkness, and must continue so to do for a week or more."

"But she will recover her sight? Oh, do not tell me that those wonderful eyes will see no more."

"I could hardly have borne to jest over the past, my dear Stark, had the future held anything so terrible. Your lady's lovely eyes are but dimmed for a time. I spoke with Sir George Jenning only yesterday. He has little fear of the ultimate result; but blackest possible night must hem her in for the present. A gleam might work terrible havoc; the optic nerve is affected, and such sympathy prevails between the eyes that injury to one may quickly involve both."

"I hope you look to this yourself. 'Tis hard to avoid daylight in April."

"My sister Gertrude is nurse."

"If I could but see Grace!"

"See her you certainly cannot. Nobody can. Never sibyl was wrapped in gleam more Cimmerian; but marry her you may and shall, if that will suffice you."

The rapidity of these revelations; the intense seriousness and most kindly expression upon Norcot's face; the bewildering rush and hurry of his own life during the past few days, all combined to move Cecil Stark. His wits swooned; his emotions yearned to believe this marvellous story. He pressed his hand to his forehead, then noticed the wine at his elbow, picked up the glass and drained it.

"Man," he said solemnly, "surely it is not in humanity to juggle upon such a theme? You cannot be deceiving me?"

"Emphatically no," answered Norcot. "I am no juggler, but a simple wool-merchant of some character and renown in these parts. In fact, a big toad in a small puddle, as the saying is. My heart went out to you when first we met, and I resolved, if opportunity offered, to do you a service. I failed; but it was your own action that defeated my good offices. This time I shall succeed, because nobody on this earth can break a marriage contract if the conditions are within the law of the land."

"She is willing?"

"For a thousand reasons; and, first, before any thought of

you, that her parents may suffer no more. They have undoubtedly endured a good deal."

"'Tis an insult to the family to wed so."

"She is not of that opinion. The ceremony once complete, you can go back to prison with a cheerful heart; or, better still, obtain a passport. I shall ride off instantly to Grace's parents and explain all. Upon her recovery, and before you depart to your own land the richer by this lovely rose, a marriage ceremony as splendid as Malherb's purse can bear may take place. Would that he would forget to play Lucifer for once and let me bear the cost."

"Such things as this don't happen," said Stark slowly.

"They don't," answered the other. "Such things can only be found within the pages of poetry. And yet you see how one romantic ass, out of the dead love of his past, has planned this little fairy tale. I am that ass, Mr. Stark. Such things don't happen; yet this thing is going to happen if you are of the same mind as Grace Malherb. She has forgiven me everything—even robbing her of daylight. 'What is the sun compared with him?' cried she. My God, how she loves you!"

Yet something in Cecil Stark's heart still doubted and cried for proof positive. Norcot's perfect voice, flowing on like an oily river, hurt his nerves. He felt that he was being muffled up and choked in honey. He dashed his hand on the table.

"Proofs—facts—realities—give me these!" he cried. "Show me how this can be, and I will bless your name for ever."

"I was waiting for you to come to your senses. This astounding news has acted like strong drink on a hungry man. Proofs are here—facts—realities too. Read this. You never heard of Charles Manners Sutton? Yet, 'tis a very well-known name among respectable people. This word he wrote. 'Tis the sign-manual of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mr. Stark."

"Go on—explain."

"There's your worthy name also, and that of Grace Sibella Malherb. You knew not that she was called Sibella too? An old family name on the mother's side. She was a Carew and my mother was also a Carew. But this family history won't interest you?"

"Not now."

"Well, having determined to see you married to my Grace, I sought the means. There are but three ways in this kingdom to be married, and all demand the co-operation of the Church. We lack a purely civil rite, but there is a talk of establishing such. First comes marriage by Banns, which necessitates three weeks' notice in a place of worship. This I tried myself, with results not unfamiliar to you. 'Twas for the best. Marriage by ordinary license requires but a fifteen days' residence in the parish where the ceremony is to take place. Doctors' Commons can supply this document at a moment's notice, or the Bishop of the Diocese will do so through his Chancellor and Surrogates. Another glass of wine? You look as if you wanted it. Now this method is equally out of place, because we cannot entertain you here for the next fifteen days, much as we should like to do so. The secret of Grace's whereabouts must be hidden no more. There remains marriage by Special License—a ceremony permission to perform which can only be given by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. It allows the contracting parties to be married anywhere they please: in a church, or on a high road, or within a private dwelling, or at the top of Dartmoor. A priest of the Church of England and two witnesses complete the entire necessary conditions. How witnesses can witness a wedding in the dark is doubtful; but they must do their best, and trust to their ears if not their eyes.

"That document, beaming upon you there, is the Special License which will permit you to marry Miss Malherb. I have friends at Court. His Grace was easily convinced of the propriety of my application. And fate favoured me, for he loves your country with a Christian charity very proper in a primate. It was enough for him that you desired instantly to return home after your long incarceration, and that your future wife was both eager and willing to accompany you. Feel it, read it, touch it! Has it not the very odour of sanctity? All this have I done for you and for her. You see, I'm not quite the rascal you thought me.

"'I never bark when out of season,
I never bite without a reason.'

Indeed, barking and biting are quite foreign to my nature."

Stark stared at the Special License without speaking.

"Still you find it difficult to believe in such a torrent of hard facts. There remains to point out the necessity for a speedy marriage. I supposed that you would be free a fortnight ago at latest. Consequently I named a date which will expire in two days. You must marry the day after to-morrow, if you can bring yourself to the ordeal so soon. You will stop here, I trust, or if not here, then at my lodge, which will be safer. As a leading man among the Americans, they'll seek you sharply. They might find you in my house; but in my lodge you will be safe. Now what say you? You must believe or not—all or none. Accept my simple good faith or reject it."

"Your honour upon it?"

"May I perish miserably, or I vanish from among men, and from the Book of Life, if I am lying to you."

"It is enough! No false man would take such an oath as that."

Stark leapt to his feet, pressed the other's hand and shook it warmly.

"God reward you for your deed, Peter Norcot. Generations to come shall bless you as I do. I believe you with all my heart. I trust you with all that makes life best living to me."

"So be it. Now get you gone. For safety I'll hold this document until after your marriage. I have planned the ceremony for the morning of the day after to-morrow. If possible you shall speak to Grace to-morrow, but Malherb has his spies here, and you'll be followed too. Therefore we must run no risk. See John Lee and send him about his business once and for all; next repair to my lodge, where you are expected. There a meal awaits you. Keep close within doors meantime, and I shall come again to you after dark."

A few moments later Norcot himself took the American to his door, showed him the lodge at his avenue gates not a quarter of a mile distant and left him there.

Then he returned to his study, lighted a taper and carefully destroyed the Special License by fire.

"A neat enough copy," he said, as it curled and flamed and vanished; "so like the real thing that a man may be forgiven for calming his mind through the perception of his senses."

Next Norcot went to his desk and drew therefrom another document in most respects resembling the first. But it was set

out upon thicker paper and the seal was of black wax, not red, as in the case of the destroyed forgery.

Meanwhile Stark met Lee, and the hollow unreality of his story fell sinister and threatening upon John's ear.

"You don't believe this nonsense," he asked simply when the tale was told.

"Every word of it! He has taken a solemn—a terrific oath. He is a man of the highest honour, or I never yet met with one!"

"You can credit these unheard-of deeds and believe that he performed them simply that you may get what you wanted?"

"Not so. 'Tis all done for her sake. He loved her. Even in losing her, he shows the noble character of his love for ever. His one thought is her happiness."

"I will never believe it. This is a gigantic lie. There's some foul deed hiding behind it, and you will live to see that I'm right."

"We shall not agree there, John. Don't think that I undervalue your great services to me. Don't think that I can ever forget your grand loyalty to your mistress. But in this matter, as a man of the world not lacking for sense and experience, I know that I am right. I am not clever, yet I feel that I can trust him. Norcot is a rare figure; but it heartens one, it enlarges one's ideas to know that such men exist. He himself is loved elsewhere; and now he desires to make us happy. I have told you all; I need only add that I believe him as I believe in Heaven, and I trust him absolutely. He has always been a true friend to me. For the present I remain here at this lodge, and on the night after our marriage, if the doctor allows it, I convey my wife back to her home. Now what shall I do for you, John Lee? The best can only be a shadow of what you have done for me."

"You're wrong; you're madly wrong! Where is Miss Grace herself? Did he tell you that?"

"No; but I gathered that she is in his house."

"Go your way then, and ask me no questions, for I shall go mine. You are mad in this and will live to repent such trust bitterly. His life—his whole life and behaviour towards her cry on my side."

"You forget his past behaviour to me. Is that to count for nothing? He has always wished me well. For you, John, I have to thank you for much," he said; "for much, much more than I can ever pay you back; yet now I ask for another favour. I am older than you, and perhaps more experienced in the ways of men. I am not deceived in Peter Norcot. At any rate, the future now lies with me. Let me ask you to renounce the affair entirely from this moment, and leave the rest to me. If I am content, you should be also."

"Never! What do I care for you, or Norcot either? 'Tis only her that I care for; only her I'm here for. Go your way, but don't dictate to me. I'll do what I can for her against you both; and though fifty thousand Norcots took their oath that they meant you fair, I'd not believe one of 'em. There's no truth in that man. He's trapped her for himself—not for you. Oh, how clear it is to me! I was the bait to bring her here; now Providence has made me bring you; and in some dark, magic way this devil will make you serve his turn too."

"Go!" said Stark, solemnly and sternly. "I mourn that you can so misread an honourable man. I am not concerned with his methods now, but his motives. He planned to lead my love into happiness by a rough road. I came in the nick of time. He has expected me. Do you understand? *He expected me!* He has foreseen every step in these events. I bid you leave my affairs in my own hands henceforth, John Lee; and I say here from my heart that, do what you will, you are my friend for ever."

"So be it then. Follow your own fool's way and see whether it will lead you back to the War Prison, or into the arms of Grace Malherb, or into your grave. And I, too, will go my way. Her happiness is my life; not you, or any man living, shall deny me to strive and fight for her to the end. I marvel and mourn for you. Your wits are dulled by the cruel prison yonder. Your senses are held captive by this man."

He spoke sorrowfully, then turned away, and before Stark had time to beg for patience and consideration, John Lee hastened into the woods and disappeared.

CHAPTER X

EYES IN THE DARK

M R. NORCOT and his kinsman, the clergyman, were walking together upon a broad terrace before the wool-stapler's dwelling-house. They had dined, and now they smoked their pipes out of doors, for the spring night was mild and clear.

Not twenty yards distant, behind the lattice of a little summer-house, a man lay concealed; and it chanced that both speakers came within earshot of him, for the minister, feeling his dinner, proposed to enter the summer-house and sit down there awhile.

"'Tis your port wine," he said. "What has a poor priest to do with such liquor?"

"He shall have much to do with it, and be a poor priest no more after to-morrow."

They sat down within two yards of John Lee. Convinced that Grace must be hidden here in Norcot's house, John was endeavouring to learn her apartment, that when nightfall came he might communicate with her. Through four-and-twenty hours, since his last interview with Cecil Stark, he had toiled without success to find her; to-night he was determined to succeed, for early on the morrow the wedding would take place, if Stark spoke the truth.

And now kindly chance threw to him information more valuable than the hiding-place of Grace Malherb. A wedding, indeed, was to be celebrated; but Peter Norcot, not the American, would be bridegroom.

The first words that fell upon Lee's ear were spoken by the clergyman.

"'Tis a very subtle piece of work; a wonderful stroke; yet I wish you had broke it to any man but me, Peter."

"My dear Relton, you're not in an after-dinner humour. 'Twas not that you drank too much port, but too little. I've a

hundred dozen of that vintage—put down by a loving father thirty years ago. Well, how like you the thought of five-and-twenty dozen? 'Tis emphatically a clergyman's wine. What potential tone—what tolerance—what breadth of view—what a fine literary flavour to your discourses all lie there!"

"To do evil that good may come—a parlous doctrine."

"Most true. I'll go further and say a damnable doctrine. I'm asking you to attempt no such thing. You are invited to marry me to a woman in the dark—a literal, not a spiritual darkness. She refuses to marry me in the daylight; therefore it is proposed to put this trick upon her for her own welfare. The young fellow from Prince Town comes to help us with his presence. He is sent, as the ram was sent to save Isaac's life. But I do not sacrifice him: I merely send him back whence he came. This girl of ours thinks that she loves him; and she believes that she will marry him to-morrow. Well, you know better."

"My part is a dastard's part."

"What? To say 'Cecil Stark' in the marriage service when you mean 'Peter Norcot'? What nonsense! As soon as the daylight bursts in upon our little ceremony, you have only to forget your error."

"I fear the issue."

"Then you fear a handsome income—a sum which to a man of your abilities and ambitions should mean power. By assisting at this pious fraud, you assure the welfare of a good but headstrong girl, and you oblige me. From being a penniless parson you rise to wealth and dignity. You——"

"What of Cecil Stark?"

"Mr. Stark broke prison very improperly, and to-morrow morning, as he quits the matrimonial chamber, a file of soldiers will be waiting to take him back again. His subsequent story of a cock and bull no one will heed. Leave that. Have you the service by heart? 'Tis a great feat."

"I know it well enough."

"There can be no prompting, recollect. The darkness of Egypt was light compared to the darkness in my study to-morrow. The grave is not darker. Both he and she are prepared for that. She thinks that his eyes suffered in an explosion of gunpowder at Prince Town; he believes that she was seriously injured while coming here. By a closely shrouded way they enter the room.

Gertrude will bring Grace ; I follow with Stark. You are already there to meet us. In the pitchy dark I hold Grace's hand and stand beside her ; Stark holds Gertrude's hand and thinks that she is Grace. You'll do your part as fast as may be. Then Stark, believing himself married, comes out into the daylight with me, and is packed off to Prince Town in a jiffy, while, soon afterwards, Grace and I bowl off to Exeter in a barouche and four. She will think I am taking her home ; and then for the first time she will learn that she is my wife."

"May it so fall out !"

"It cannot fail. I've forgot nothing. There are, of course, a thousand minor problems and subordinate possibilities ; but all have been provided for."

"You and your wife vanish ; Stark returns to prison ; and I am left. How if an infuriated father comes to challenge me ?"

"Tut, tut ! You are too poor a thing for this business. Well, what then ? You have but to say that at my desire you conducted a legal and proper service ; you have but to show the marriage license that I leave behind me. You speak of a straightforward wedding in honest daylight, and the bride willing. Concerning Cecil Stark you know nothing. Gertrude and my man, Mason, the other witness, substantiate you, and soon there will come a dutiful letter from Grace——"

"You believe that ?"

"Once married all is well. The honeymoon will throw a genial light upon duty. She forgives me in a week and even begins to understand me. There's only one cloud : I couldn't get what I wanted out of old Lovey—a certain amphora. She's much too clever for me. Your pipe is out."

John Lee had heard every syllable of this conversation ; and he had forgotten himself so completely that now, dead to danger, he was as close to the speakers as he could get, with his face pressed to the lattice of the summer-house. Suddenly Rehon Norcot struck a light, and before Lee could duck his head the flame had touched his eyes and revealed him. Peter was quick, but the other man had the advantage. There was a crash in the shrubbery, then a figure broke cover, sped into the grass-lands below, and vanished.

"We are undone !" cried the clergyman. "I knew this could not come to good. Oh, Peter, my reputation !"

"Peace, you silly sheep, this is no time for babble! All's yet well. I marked the man and know him. 'Tis the gipsy, John Lee, and I can deal with him. The problem's simple. He runs to get at Stark; but that can be prevented."

"For God's sake, let us go in. I'm struck with an ague."

"That such a worm should have power to wield the sacraments of God! Come you in, and hasten to my sister. Bid Gertrude summon Mason and go down to the factory at once. Grace Malherb must be under this roof as quickly as possible. Let them fetch her now. I cannot trust her there longer, with that rogue on the prowl. I'll deal with Lee once for all. Hasten, hasten, my bold jellyfish; your fortune depends on't!"

Relton Norcot, trembling in every limb, entered the house, while Peter, familiar with the land, and well knowing that he could reach the lodge where Cecil Stark lay, much more quickly and directly than was possible for John Lee, now proceeded thither, knocked at the window of the little room in which the American resided, mounted the sill and soon stood beside his guest. Stark was already impatient.

"But eight hours, friend. Then your pearl is yours—the wealth of Ind! And you'll lunch at Fox Tor Farm with your stepfather! I wonder a little what wine Malherb will bring out of his cellar!"

"Eight hours—eight hours."

"When the stable clock beats six and the pheasants call in the pine woods yonder, we shall expect you at the house. Farewell until morning. And one word of caution. Lie very low to-night. They're hunting for you. They have set a price upon you. A file of soldiers is in Chagford. It seems that they much resent your departure at the Prison, for many of the Americans cry that you were slain when the soldiers fired, and the authorities cannot easily disprove it since your disappearance."

"I'll disprove it instantly after that I am married."

"Until then bury yourself. John Lee's responsible for this, I fear. He means us both mischief now. Poor devil—he dared to love her too."

Norcot departed, whistled for a woodman, and was presently placing his servants all round his lodge, with injunctions to prevent any meeting between Cecil Stark and a stranger. He had offered a handsome reward for the capture of Lee, and was about

to return to his house, when from the stables came unexpected news.

A groom with a broken head appeared roaring for his master; and, confronted with Peter, he explained that sudden noises had brought him into the stable-yard, to find a strange man hastening out of it on Norcot's own black horse, 'Victor.'

"I knowed un in the dark by his white stocking, an' I said, 'Be that you, maister?' But the man made no answer, so I got in the way an' axed him who the dowl he was, an' wheer he might be off to. With that he fetched me such a whisterpoop 'pon the side of the head that I went down like a man shot, an' afore I could get up again he was off."

"So much the better," said Mr. Norcot. "Keep quiet about it for the present. I know the rascal, and I know where he has gone. He'll come back in the morning."

Then, confident that Lee was safe for the present, Peter hastened off to the wool factory, that he might assist to bring Grace to his house.

Lee, indeed, was far away. He had guessed that Norcot would forestall his approach to Stark, and though John tried hard to get to the lodge, he knew nothing of the nearest way, and after running a roundabout course of a mile, finally found himself in the stable-yard. This accident inspired him to another action, and he determined to take a horse and ride over to Fox Tor Farm for Maurice Malherb. It yet wanted two hours of midnight, and it might be possible to get Malherb to Chagford by dawn. Lee himself hoped to perform his journey and be back again while it was yet dark. He carried his plan out instantly, to the detriment of the stableman who attempted to stop him, and soon, with a bridle, but bare-backed, he sped over the nightly Moor, while a glory of rapid motion brought joy to his heart under the darkness. It was long since he had felt a good horse between his legs.

Grace Malherb meantime, suspecting nothing, entered the web of the spider and longed for her marriage hour to come. She beamed upon the house party assembled, was the soul of graciousness to Peter Norcot, counted the hours that still kept her from her father and mother, and mourned only one circumstance; that her sweetheart's wounded eyes would never see the sun shine upon his wedding day. It was understood by poor Grace that

Cecil Stark must remain at Chagford until well again ; while as soon as the marriage ceremony was ended, Peter had promised to escort her home. She was marvellously reconciled to the wool-stapler. From her first indignation and passion he had weaned her day by day, and as with the subtlest ingenuity he had developed his fairy story and lent to it the colours of reality, Grace at last believed and blessed his name. The natural desire of the lovers that they should meet, Norcot overruled by many pleas. Each continued to believe the other blind ; each had seen the forgery ; for the rest, oral messages passed between them and were carefully garbled to fit the pretended circumstances. With hyperbolical gleam and glitter did Peter do his work, and throw an enchanted mantle of verity over his enterprise. Actual genius marked his operations ; he made the fantastic solid, the imaginary real. His masterpiece rang true : it was enduring and full of vitality. He had, of course, to do with a man and a woman plunged deep in love ; and his deception was absolute.

Now there remained to settle with John Lee, and Norcot prepared to undertake that task himself. Very accurately he gauged John's intentions, guessed his destination, and calculated the hour of his return. Once back again, he would risk all things to communicate with Stark ; but he might be met upon the way, and stopped once for ever before he did further mischief. Peter planned his operations to an hour ; saw Grace settled with his sister ; prepared his study so that no ray of light could penetrate it ; directed Relton Norcot exactly where to take his place ; said a final word to his man, Mason ; and then returned into the darkness.

"He will come much faster than Malherb," reflected the wool-stapler, "and, yes—it may be necessary."

He went back into the house, visited his dressing-room, and brought from it a double-barrelled pistol.

There was but one way by which John Lee would return : down a narrow lane which separated Norcot's estate from the domains of the Manor ; and here the wool-stapler stationed himself. It was still dark, and after a patient hour, the night wind quickened Peter's wits. Upon the first glimmer of dawn, he asked himself a question.

Why wait a moment longer ? Why not escape this simple difficulty by a little haste ?

In an instant he determined to call up Cecil Stark and precipitate the marriage. But his intention came too late. A horse's hoofs already clattered down the lane, and the shadowy figure of a mounted man approached. Whereupon Peter Norcot leapt into the path from a high hedge, where he had taken his position. He lifted up his voice and called to the horse; and 'Victor,' knowing his master's tones, stood still.

John Lee had fulfilled his task, and was now returning from Fox Tor Farm; while, many miles behind him, followed Maurice Malherb with Thomas Putt and Mark Bickford, at the best pace they could command. All three were mounted, and all three were well armed.

CHAPTER XI

FAREWELL, LOVEY LEE

DAWN, like a red slant gash on a dead man's throat, surprised Putt and Bickford where they waited for their master on the way. They had started before him, for Malherb's saddle-horse was at grass and had to be captured after Lee brought his news.

"I shall, however, quickly overtake you," Mr. Malherb said to his men. "Travel by Sherberton; hold over Believer Tor; then pass under Dagger Farm and cross East Dart at the pack-horse bridge."

These things the labourers had done and now hesitated to proceed to Chagford without Maurice Malherb. They dismounted, therefore, by the old 'cyclopean' span that still crosses Dart at Postbridge, sheltered themselves and their steeds against the sting of the air and listened where Dart sang to the savage dawn. Young green things of the year shivered in the morning chill; nature still slept; the men got under a flaming brake of spring furze that made light in the grey; then, waiting there, they heard the clink of iron-shod feet on granite and knew that somebody was crossing the bridge. A heron floated upon broad wings down stream; and in the marshes at hand a cock curlew woke and uttered strange, bubbling cries of warning to his mate.

One tall, thin figure appeared upon the bridge, and Putt observed it.

"What a maypole!" he cried, "yet how a minces in his going for such a long-legged un!"

"I'll wager the man's up to no good at this hour. Us have both got hoss pistols; let's stop him!" "Twill warm us," exclaimed Bickford.

Thomas agreed, and together they leapt from their hiding-place

and blocked the passage of the bridge. Then Putt, at close quarters, stared into the great white face frowning down upon him and nearly fell into the water.

"God's Word! 'Tis a ghost from the grave," he shouted. "Is the old varmint us buried after Christmas, come to life an' into breeches!"

But Mark Bickford had no imagination.

"If she'm alive, us never buried her," he declared. "Cock ur pistol an' hold it to her head."

"You stand still, Lovey Lee, an' give an account of yourself," commanded Putt. "Since you'm alive, I don't care a farden for u."

"That ban't my name," answered the ancient woman gruffly. "Stand by an' let me pass, or I'll knock 'e in the river, the pair of 'e!"

"Her can talk an' tell lies, so her's no more a ghost than us," said Bickford. "Now what be you doing here, an' where be you going, you bad old devil?"

Lovey drew herself up and regarded the two clowns with indignation. She felt it hard that at this critical moment of her life such rubbish should beard her thus. All had fallen out as she desired. Her wealth was secure. In her flat bosom she carried two thousand pounds of paper money provided by Peter Norcot; upon her back was a little box strapped tightly there. For the rest she bore a heavy stick and was now upon her way to Ashburton. Plans were completed for her escape. She would proceed to Dartmouth and thence to France.

Perceiving that she had been recognised, the miser attempted no further evasion. These peasants must be bought and that instantly. Putt was angry with Lovey for the tricks that she had played on honest men; but Bickford appeared merely curious to learn her recent history.

"They wanted to hang you, and still want to," declared Tom. "But now the world thinks as master killed you."

"Let it go on thinking so," said Lovey. "What matter what the world thinks, my bold heroes, so long as you've got money in your purses? I be busy just now, so let me go my way, please, without more speech."

"A man's purse be his stronghold as you say," answered Bickford; "an' mine's nought better'n a shelled peascod this

many days ; but since there's twenty pound on your head, me an' Putt here will make ten apiece by you."

"Ten pound was offered, not twenty," answered Lovey.

"I say 'twas twenty."

"You'm a cruel devil to rob an old woman."

"Tis the State will pay, not you," answered Bickford.

"An' you'm the cruel devil," retorted Putt— "you an' have brought Matherb's head so low— to the grave a'most."

"Money's money," repeated Bickford, "an' if you've got any Mother Lee, now be the time to spend some. Us know you'n made of it, for all your rags. What'll you pay us not to take you along to Prince Town?"

Lovey wrung her hands.

"You silly zanies—me—look at me—clad in a dead man's clothes! Money—a few poor pounds scraped together—God He knows how few. An' a long life of starvation to come by 'em."

"What's in thicky box?" asked Bickford abruptly.

"Nought—a mere glass toy kept for old sake's sake. A thing not worth a rush but for memory. An' since you ax for money, I'll give 'e half I've got, though 'tis like giving my life's blood—a five-pound note to share."

Her greed, even in this tremendous crisis, overreached her wit. A round sum had dazzled the labourers, and they had doubtless accepted it and let her depart, only to regret their conduct too late. But this miserly offer ruined Lovey Lee. Bickford was of a grasping nature also. Now greed met greed, and both man and woman were presently punished.

"'Tis much too little. Us want to see what be in that box slung so snug on your shoulder."

"An' see I will," added Tom Putt.

"My solemn word of honour, 'tis no more than a little trashy joney of glass—a keepsake of one long dead. Not worth a shilling to anybody but me. Leave that. Since five won't satisfy you, I'll make it ten. Then I'm a ruined woman."

"Give me that box—else I'll take it," said Putt firmly.

"Not that, not that; if you'm a man, don't touch it. 'Tis everything to me, nought to nobody else. I was lying—I was ly— to 'e. I be in such a hurry. I've got more than I said—just a few pounds. Fifty—fitty sovereigns in paper—twenty five apiece to let me go my way."

"That's better," said Putt. "I'll close at that if you will, Mark."

"Not me—not now. Her's lying still. Us have got her, now we'll squeeze her. Us must see what's in that box—money or no money. I lay 'tis stuffed with diamonds."

"Oh, Christ!" cried the woman. "What 'tis to deal with two pig-headed fools! Here—here be a hundred pounds—take it and let me pass."

She turned from them, dived in her breast and flourished the notes before their faces.

"Pretty money seemingly, but not enough," said Bickford. "I lay there's thousands hid where your damned old heart beats. An' not a penny of it but what was stolen."

"An' I be more set than ever on seeing the inside of that there hid box," added Putt stolidly. "An' I be going to, or God's my judge, I'll take you to Prince Town, Lovey Lee."

The woman stared helplessly upon them.

"There ban't no law on your side," continued Putt calmly; "for you'm dead an' buried in Widecombe churchyard; and a human, once dead an' buried, have no more rights than a bird in a tree. So you'd best to open that box afore I take it away from be for good an' all."

Fire flashed in Lovey's eyes and her teeth closed like a trap. More than her life was now at stake; yet she stood powerless before this determined man.

"Will you swear to give it back to me, afore the God of Doom?" she asked, drawing the box round from her shoulder.

"I'll swear to nought. If 'tis only a glass image, it be useless to any sensible chap, an' you can keep it. But if 'tis watches or gold trinkums, then you've stole 'em, an' we'll take 'em for ourselves," declared Bickford.

"See for yourself, then, you cursed clods! An' come off this bridge. If it fell!"

The woman's anger died as she opened her box; her hands trembled; her man's hat had fallen off, and tattered wisps of white hair hung round her head. She sat down, cowered over the treasure, and revealed her sex in this attitude.

Lovey opened her box with utmost care, and from a close packing of sphagnum moss, brought forth the Malherb amphora. Putt took it clumsily, and she screamed to him to be cautious.

Bickford then examined the box, and reported that nothing more remained in it.

"Then give my poor vase back for the love of your mothers," she cried. "You see 'twas solemn truth I spoke to 'e."

"First, there's the matter of money," answered Bickford. "What money be you going to part with? You'm made of bank-notes by the look of it. Maybe you'll never get the chance of setting up two young men in life again."

"If I could get my hands on your dog's throat!"

"You can't; an' best be civil, or you'll repent it," answered Bickford.

Then he took the amphora from Putt's hand, walked twenty yards away, and set it up carefully on a rock.

"You said fifty each," said Mark as he returned. "I lay you meant more." Then the labourer broke off and addressed his companion. "Ban't no sin to drag money out of this old mully-grubs; for you know s^t well as me that she never come by an honest penny in her life. Now I've sticked up her trash 'pon yonder rock, an' I be going to chuck stones at it till she comes to my figure; and sarve her damn well right, for she's bad to the bone—as all Dartymoor knows."

Lovey shrieked and Thomas Putt answered judicially—

"To terrify some money out of her be a fair thing. 'Tis payment for what master suffered."

The woman screamed and groaned. She fell at their feet, clasped their knees, grovelled, uttered blessings and cursings, raved until a steam hung over her lips in the chill air, called upon God and the devil to help her.

"What's the figure then?" asked Putt.

"Five hunderd—five hunderd pound this instant between you. For your sweethearts for——"

In answer, and before Putt, who was well satisfied, could stop him, Mark Bickford had flung a stone at the amphora. The pebble started to the right, came round true with the throw, and missed the precious vessel by inches. The woman followed the flight, and a lifetime of agony passed over her in the space of seconds. Then she turned upon Mark and poured forth a flood of appalling curses.

"Ban't five hunderd enough?" asked Thomas calmly.

"No, Tom, it ban't," answered the avaricious Bickford. "This

here's the chance of a lifetime. Us'll be made men or mice, for evermore."

Putt picked up a stone.

"I do think she'm rich enough to part with a bit more," he said. "Now I be going to have a chuck, an' I'm a better shot than him, ban't I, Mark?"

"Yes, you be."

"Three hunderd—three hunderd—four hunderd—four hunderd for each of 'e. I'd tear my heart out for 'e if I could, you greedy, cruel dogs. Spare it, spare all that an old woman have got in the wide world. If you knew—if——"

Putt flung a stone and took care to do no harm. His missile fell into the river a yard wide. Then Bickford prepared to fling again.

"Third time be lucky," he said. "I'll bet you all the old witch's money as I scat un to shivers now."

"Four fifty for each of 'e—four hunderd an' fifty each; an' it do leave me picked clean to the bone."

She plunged her hand into her breast and dragged out a pile of notes.

"Take it an' leave me to starve, you sarpints; you as rob widows' houses. Take it; an' may it turn to hell fire an' burn your entrails for everlasting!"

"Four fifty's good enough for me," said Putt.

"Bah! you'm a fool," answered Bickford. "You don't know how to pick a nut when you've got one. Leave her to me. I say five hunderd apiece—that, or this stone goes."

"Before the eyes of Heaven, I haven't got it! Strip these dead man's rags off me; you'll find no more. 'Tis every farthing I have in the world—a long life's bitter earnings!"

The labourer, with an eye upon her, drew his hand slowly back to throw again. For a second Lovey's fingers fluttered involuntarily towards her breast; and Mark Bickford saw and laughed in triumph.

"Ha, ha, ha! I knowed I was right. Yet I'll send it along; just to bring the old hell-cat to reason."

He flung again, without meaning to injure the amphora, but hit the rock on which it stood and missed the treasure by a hair's breadth. At the same moment Maurice Malherb's horse appeared round the rock, and the glancing stone very nearly struck Mr. Bickford's master.

"You vagabonds! What means——?" cried out Malherb. Then he broke off and stared at an object near his elbow. There, under red dawnlight, glittered the Malherb amphora, and the frank yet lurid illumination awoke new beauties in that dazzling gem. Each Cupid blushed with life as he peeped from the acanthus leaves. For a moment the master glared at his treasure while Bickford and Putt shivered. Then Lovey Lee, perceiving, indeed, that hope was dead, uttered a mournful howl. The sound wakened Malherb from his trance. He dismounted, picked up the amphora, and came forward.

"What man is that?" he asked; "and what are you knaves doing, loitering here?"

Then he approached Lovey, and knew her, and his servants saw him turn pale. He dropped back a pace and the amphora fell out of his hand—into soft heather where it took no hurt. A moment later his face turned cherry-red and his eyes rolled up. Putt rushed forward, but the danger passed and Malherb's brain resisted the shock.

"I must not rejoice too soon, or I may perish. And yet—speak. This is a woman—*the* woman of all women!"

"'Tis true, your honour's goodness. Lovey Lee, begging your pardon; her as you thought you'd properly knocked 'pon the head."

"An' she'm wrapped up in fifty-pound notes, your honour," said Bickford, "an' I hope your honour won't let her keep 'em from two honest men, for 'tis stolen money, an' her was going to——"

"Peace!" thundered Malherb. "Take yourselves and your buzzing behind me."

He had not removed his eyes from Lovey Lee's face. His mind and soul were there.

Now he approached her and spoke gently.

"Tell me," he said. "Let me hear your voice. Do not fear. Are you Lovey Lee—she whom I struck down and left for dead a thousand years ago on Cater's Beam?"

Lovey calculated the chances. She was broken now, for at last the Malherb amphora lay in the power of its rightful owner. Unconquerable hate gleamed in her eyes, but her voice sounded meek and mild.

"A cruel blow, Malherb, an' me so old. Yet I agged 'e to it.

Malherb. There, and the dazzling from the his trea-, perceiv- wl. The d, picked u knaves

Forgive my evil tongue. I'm a woman still, for all my wickedness. I'll kneel to 'e; I'll pray to 'e; I'll lick thy boots. I've paid for my sins, God knows that: don't send me o the gallows, after all these days."

"You are Lovey Lee?"

"Ess—that forlorn wretch. Look!"

She pulled back her hair and he saw his handiwork.

"Forgive a coward's blow, woman."

"'Twas the hand of God, not yours," she answered. "When you cracked my head, you let a thousand devils out. I bless your name—even I——"

"This day is sacred for evermore," he said very slowly. "To many you have brought darkness and sorrow; to me you stand here now a messenger of light from Heaven—an angel of good tidings. Henceforth may your name be blessed. Alive and not dead!"

The labourers stared, and Lovey cast them a bitter glance that penetrated to their rude consciousness. Their hopes, at least, were shattered.

She pointed to the amphora where it lay at Malherb's feet.

"They've stabbed me to the soul and taken half my remaining years from me. A moment more and it would have been splinters in the river—my life and my heart's blood."

Maurice Malherb stared at the glass bubble. To him it was an atom of inconceivable insignificance in the face of this stupendous discovery that Lovey lived.

"Her snake's life be wrapped up in that toy, your honour," said Bickford, "an' I'll swear to God she said it weren't of no account to anybody but her."

"'Twas true. If you'd cracked it, my life would have cracked with it. But now—'tis mine no more. My light's out; my thread's spun. I only ax that I may hold it in this old hand once again; then I'll give it to 'e, an' vanish out of man's sight for ever."

This she said meaning to destroy the vase, to dash it into a thousand fragments at Malherb's feet and take the consequences. He did not guess at her malignant purpose. Her harsh, high voice was now the music of Heaven to his ear; the lizard life in her wrinkled carcase oozed like balm upon his sight and made him young. He feasted his senses upon her, even while he

doubted his sense; and in spirit uttered a petition to 'his Maker that this might be no dream.

"Touch me, Lovey Lee," he commanded. "Hold my hand in yours, press upon it. I must feel your flesh warm; I must put my finger upon your pulse that I may know your heart is beating. You have risen from the dead and lifted me from worse than death. Give me your hand."

She held out to him her gnarled, huge paw. It was wrinkled and bony; each great artery ran like a blue cord under the brown skin; each black nail was sharp as an eagle's claw.

"Heed your going," she said, "else that treasure there will fall under your heel—the amphora."

He saw her eyes burning upon it, and a sudden, mad, Malherb impulse took him.

"You have given me my life once more, shall I rob you of yours again? No! Take up that trash and begone. Bear witness she lives, you men. Now depart, and let that glass—priceless as the world goes—be my payment to you 'Tis little enough for what I gain this day—light, air, life, Heaven, the right to walk the earth and to look the world in the face. An innocent man! Oh, God of Mercy, I thank Thee!"

With a strange cry, as of some mother-beast that recovers her lost young, the ancient creature fell upon her treasure, hid it away quickly and disappeared, like a shadow, behind the mist. Not a word she spoke of thanks nor of blessing; but she gathered up the amphora and melted away into the morning air, like some fantastic exhalation of dawn that vanishes at sunrise.

Neither did Malherb speak again. He mounted his horse, watched Lovey depart, and then, forgetting, as it seemed, the men behind him, galloped fast upon his way. Exultation marked his movements. His attitude was of a boy that rode to hounds. Even the gravity of the present enterprise was for a time powerless to make him grave.

The men behind him felt that their master was struggling with a full heart. They knew that had he been alone, Malherb had shouted to the sun and wakened the echoes of the ancient hills with thanksgivings. The nature of his joy they failed signally to apprehend. As for Bickford and Putt, their own state was the reverse of gracious.

"I can't go so fast," said Mark to Tom. "Us have made damned

tools of ourselves to-day—got within reach of hundreds and missed 'em. I could tear my hair off. Blast the old witch!"

"'Tis fair payment for being so beastly greedy," answered Putt. "All your fault. If you'd took what she offered last, you'd have had it in your pocket now, instead of nought. Sarve you right."

"I ban't much in a mind to sit down under it, however," growled Bickford.

"No more be I, for that matter—only just let me think a minute."

After riding forward another hundred yards Mr. Putt stopped suddenly.

"My hoss have fallen lame," he said.

"Not she," answered Bickford. "Her goeth well as ever."

"I say she's lame," retorted the other. "Get you after master, best pace you can. I'll come presently. There's a stone in the mare's hoof."

Bickford's slow brains now perceived his friend's drift.

"You'll get the sack for it," he said, looking back into the valley where Lovey Lee had disappeared.

"No great matter if I did; but I shan't. When the man comes to his senses—why, that's the blessed jug all the fuss was about! 'Tis worth thousands of pounds."

"Halves wi' me," said Bickford.

"Shares, perhaps," answered Putt. "I ban't going to say 'halves'; I've growed rather sick of you since the morning."

In a moment Thomas turned on his tracks and Mark Bickford hastened after his master. Malherb never looked back, and the riders were already upon the high ground above Chagford and just about to enter that lane, where, two hours earlier, John Lee had met with Peter Norrot, when Bickford heard a galloping horse and saw that Putt was returning. At sight of Tom's countenance even his phlegmatic companion was staggered, for Putt presented a dismal and hideous spectacle. His breast was soaked with blood and four deep parallel gashes between white weals scored his face from brow to chin. His pink-rimmed eyes were bulging and one of his ears had swollen to ridiculous dimensions. But upon his back was a box that contained the Malherb amphora.

"Aw jimmery! you've got it!" cried Mark. "But, 'slife! she've torn your eyes out of your head!"

"Her tried to. I've fought a cargo of mountain cats. God knows how I've come out alive. But I didn't fire—not a shot, though sore tempted. I didn't kill her; she've done for herself. I caught her down nigh Drury Farm, and went for her without words. She seed my meaning in a flash. Curse! Never I heard such a hail of gashly curses; an' she come at me all ends up like a bulldog. Her nails was in my eyes afore I could draw breath; but I kept my seat while she tore an' scratched, an' grabbed the box; an' by good chance the strap gived way. Then she ran fifty yards after my hoss; an' then she knowed 'twas all up wi' her, an' stopped. 'Twas awful what comed after. Her heart cracked. I heard a sound like a woodpecker tapping, an' looked, an' seed her beating her head in with a gert stone. But she couldn't die that way, so she went to a rock an' flinged herself against it skull first, like a ram butting. An' then she rolled over, over an' over into the river. God's my judge I'd have saved her if it had been any other mortal she!"

"All that pile of paper money?"

"'Twas nought to her, after the vase was gone."

"All that good money!"

"Pulp by now. She'm dead this time, anyway, if she'm flesh and blood."

"I wish you'd took the money, all the same."

"You can go to hell an' ax her for the money," said Putt indignantly. "I've got this here thing for master—not you. You'm a miserly hunks, an' I hope you won't be a penny the better by this job, for you don't deserve to be."

As he spoke the men drew up to their leader, and all three riders trotted slowly down the steep lane which led into Chagford.

CHAPTER XII

MANOR WOODS

WHEN John Lee saw Peter Norcot at his horse's head, he was well satisfied. That Norcot was determined he should not have any communication with Cecil Stark, John perceived, but he also knew that while Peter stood beside him here, no harm could befall Grace. To keep the man from returning to his house and his enterprise would answer Lee's purpose quite as well as speech with Stark.

"Excellently met," said Norcot. "I've waited long for you. I need not ask if 'Victor' carried you well. But you're growing too busy, John Lee. Now come aside and explain why you are so active in this business. Have a care, young man! You run into considerable danger."

"I don't fear you. And you know well enough the reasons that I am busy. You've hatched a piece of damnable knavery, and by God's goodness I overheard it. Stark trusts you; you've deceived his honest heart. But I never trusted you. Not one word of your wickedness surprised me."

"Well, plain speaking is good for the soul, my poor John. And any soul-prescription may be worth your attention just now, for, unless you mend your manners, I shall have to be short and sharp with you.

"The dreadful reckoning; and men smile no more."

You overheard me and my cousin. Was it all clear to you? Were there any gaps? You may as well know exactly what is going to happen since the affair interests you so deeply. Ask what questions you please, but be brief. Poor 'Victor'! You've made him gallop to-night."

Norcot tethered his horse at a gate; then he entered it and Lee followed him.

"Come into the Manor Woods. I can give you half an hour,

no more. After that time our little play begins, and I am to be wedded to Grace Malherb, for better, for worse. You know all that."

"And Cecil Stark?"

"Stark, good soul, will play his part and press a wedding-ring upon my sister's finger. Then the light of day serves to show him Sergeant Bradridge and a file of soldiers patiently waiting for his sapient person to convey him back to Prince Town."

"Think better of it. Don't blast your own life and that of this man and woman. She will always hate you, as she always has."

"Advice! Well, take some from me. I cannot stop long, but——"

"Stop you shall, Peter Norcot! Not until you've killed me do you return to this knavery."

"I was afraid you'd take that view. I don't want blood on my hands to-day. Even I have my superstitions and sentiments. Consider; if you detain me how things must fall awry. It would be the play of *Hamlet* without the Dane. Why, my fool cousin might even lose his head and marry 'em, if that was possible! A pretty conceit. She'll feel my hand in the dead darkness and think 'tis his. I am dumb and he speaks the answers. He'll feel my sister's hand and think 'tis hers. Gertrude is dumb, and Grace speaks the answers. But these things cannot be managed without me. I must get back at any cost. My wedding tour is planned. Better live to think of me and my happy bride upon the Continent than perish in this cold dawn. Death is so final."

"'Tis you shall die, for I will kill you rather than let you return now."

"The possibility of this attitude on your part had occurred to me, John Lee. Unfortunately for yourself, you have never understood me. I am no enemy to any living man. I wish the world well. But I, too, have my life to live, and those who intervene between me and my plans and purposes pay for their blunder. I will tell you something, since we have no witness. It may help you to comprehend me and draw you out of the jaws of death, wherein frankly you stand at this moment. I killed my late uncle, Norman Norcot. I took his gun while he sat in thought, and thrust it under his chin and shot him like a rabbit. Do you wish to follow him?"

Without answering, John Lee dashed forward at Norcot's throat;

at Peter's hand, though in his pocket, was on a pistol trigger. He leapt swiftly aside, and before Lee could turn, the wool-tapler had fired into his body. For a second John stood shaking; then he sank forward and fell on his face. Frightened blackbirds fled shrieking, with shrill chink-chink-chink-chinketty-chink: the smoke arose and hung in a thin flat layer under the boughs of the trees.

"Lucky wretch!" said the murderer, looking down. "'Death is a morsel best bolted whole,' as divine Montaigne remarks. Naught is nastier to chew upon. May I go as easy when my turn comes!

"Light lay the earth, John Lee, upon thy clay—
That so the dogs may easier find their prey."

Yes—Squire Yeoland's dogs, and his gamekeepers. It remains to plan your next appearance before I hasten on to my own."

He stood and reflected, then nodded his head quickly.

"They stand along the covert side at regular intervals, and happily I know how to find 'em. Rest there, 'thou wretched, rash, intruding fool,' until I've found what I seek."

He put up his pistol, then looked at his watch.

"How time flies!"

Turning round, Peter now plunged into the forest, and at a covert side, where a drive was cut through dense larch woods with undergrowth of furze and briar, he began to make search, and advanced, foot by foot, with the utmost caution. Each yard of the ground he scrutinised as though his own life depended upon it; and, indeed, the man's present quest did not lack for personal danger. Here, a yard within the pheasant coverts, were set spring-guns two feet above the ground. The countryside raged against these infernal engines, but at that date they were legal, and a man might place them in his own preserves if it pleased him to do so.

Norcot's purpose was now to discover one of these weapons and to drag John Lee before it. He then designed to discharge the gun into his victim's wounded side, and so leave the corpse for others to find. With utmost care he pursued his search; and presently he started back with an oath, for his foot actually scraped a wire, and, looking up, he saw the short, squat muzzle of a gun fastened to a young larch and pointing straight at his belly. Peter sweated at this escape. For a moment it unsteadied him.

Then tearing down an ash sapling, peeling it, and sticking it beside the wire, he returned hastily where the dead man lay—thirty yards distant.

Now Norcot deliberately took off his coat and waistcoat, that they might escape all mark of this deed. Next, he bent down, grasped Lee under the armpits, gripped his own hands round the other's back, and began steadily to drag him where stood the peeled ash wand at the edge of the copse.

He had approached to within ten yards of the wire, and was turning his head to see his exact position when a startling quiver ran through the inert mass he dragged along. Lee, though wounded to death, was not yet dead. His feet stuck to the ground, and Peter felt a pair of arms, limp until now, suddenly lifted and tightening round his waist. This unexpected spark of life galvanising a corpse shook him. His own breast was wet with the other's blood, for John bled from the lung; but he was still alive, and Norcot guessed at his vitality by the sudden tightening of the wounded man's arms round his neck. For answer he squeezed his wretched burden with a hug like a bear, whereon poor Lee relaxed his hold and his head fell forward again. But just as Peter had reached the wire and was about to drop the dying man in a line with the muzzle of the spring-gun, John's consciousness returned. He appeared to divine the enemy's intent, and for a moment his strength waxed and he struggled desperately. Drenched with blood and blinded by Lee's arm over his face, Peter started back, to be free of his foe, took him by the throat and hurled him to the ground with all his strength.

"Die!" cried the murderer. "Cease this struggling like a stuck pig and die decently. I——"

John had hold of the other's leg, but Norcot kicked him and tore himself free as he spoke. The force of this action, however, made Peter lose equilibrium. He stepped backwards, hit a hidden root, slipped his foot and fell heavily upon the wire of the spring-gun.

Lee, kicked in the face, had fainted; but he was out of the line of fire; and now he recovered consciousness in time to gaze about him and witness the end of Peter Norcot.

The unlucky wool stapler, falling as he struck the wire, had received the charge, at close quarters, in his back. The shot,

ough intended to maim or wound, but not to kill, was, under these circumstances, and at this range, fatal. Moments separated Norcot from death. The stinging, red-hot agony of the blow did not deprive him of consciousness. Then, using his last breath, he cried aloud—

"Death and hell—done for! To leave life now! No luck! Tut—urg—gurg——"

And Lee, with fading eyes, saw Peter Norcot's life-blood choke him.

Thrice he writhed: thrice he beat the earth with his hands and sought for air; then he perished.

Cock pheasants began to crow in the coverts: and far away, a keeper, hearing gun fire, put a whistle to his mouth and blew it.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PASSING OF JOHN

GERTRUDE NORCOT stood under the morning light, in misery and suspense, for the appointed time had passed and all was in readiness; only her brother tarried. Cecil Stark had been closeted in the darkened library with Relton Norcot for half an hour; the man Mason waited at the door; Grace Malherb wild with impatience, and already frightened at the delay, asked a thousand questions, and was with difficulty prevented from leaving the drawing-room, where she waited with Gertrude.

Peter Norcot's sister stood irresolute and fearful. That Peter should be late on such a critical occasion was only to be explained by unlooked-for ill fortune. What to do she could not guess; the possibility of action there was none; nor dared she speak to Relton, for he had his hands full with the American. Then, as she stood in the first clear sunshine of that day, came the sound of a galloping horse. It approached swiftly, and, not even waiting until the rider appeared, Miss Norcot, positive that her brother was close at hand, hastened into the house and bade Grace Malherb follow her as quickly as possible.

"At last Peter has returned," she said. "He will come after us in a moment. Without him we could not begin, for he is one of the witnesses of the marriage; but we may precede him now. Already I hear him in the hall. Hasten! And do not fear the dead darkness. It is vital to Mr. Cecil that no ray of light shall yet touch his eyes."

"Thank God that Peter is here, dear Gertrude. I began to fear a thousand things. Go in front and I will follow you close."

Gertrude hastened behind the heavy curtains that led to the study. Through successive folds of increasing gloom they appeared to penetrate; and then a door stayed their progress.

"Hold my hand now," said Miss Norcot. "Enter with me and let me shut the door quickly behind us. Do not speak yet, or let him know that you are here."

"Hark!" cried Grace. "Voices behind us—but not Peter's voice! Gertrude, it is father! No other man speaks so deep or so loud."

A great volume of sound echoed in the rear, and for a moment Gertrude Norcot lost her presence of mind.

"Something has happened to my brother," she said. "I feel—I know it. He would be here if he had power to be here. Come quickly!"

She pushed Grace into the darkened room, followed her and locked the door.

"Peace," she said; "let no voice be lifted. We are in danger!"

Meanwhile Maurice Malherb, followed by Thomas Puit and Mark Bickford, had appeared before the dwelling of Peter Norcot, and become witnesses to strange sights. Upon one side of the building, standing at ease and evidently waiting for information from within, were Sergeant Bradridge and a dozen soldiers; while close at hand a barouche, with four horses and a postilion, drove slowly up and down.

Sergeant Bradridge saluted Malherb, but received no answering compliment.

"There's devilry afoot here!" cried the master. "We'll not wait to ring bells. I only pray we're in time. 'Twould match my usual fortune if the blessing that Heaven sent at dawn was to be followed by a crushing catastrophe in this affair. Follow close, my men, and use your weapons if occasion demands it."

He dismounted, while his blown horse, with outstretched legs, bent its head and panted hard. Then, banishing ceremony, Malherb entered the house, and his followers came close at his heels. Gertrude Norcot heard him bawl for Peter as she locked the door of the study. But none answered, and for a moment Norcot's sister regretted her action. She should have faced the furious father and, with an excuse, have led him from the house. She lacked her brother's intelligence and ready wit, however, and now the four waited in silence, while noises without approached and grew louder.

Malherb was raving aloud and tramping through the silent house.

"I'll leave no room unsearched! The scoundrel lied to me when last I came here—or his sister and that white-faced worm her cousin, did so. Come; be rough and ready. Fiends and furies! What trap of curtain on curtain is this? The house is a spider's web! Prime your pistols and fire 'em if any man stops you."

Malherb began tearing down the black hangings that separated him from the study; Bickford lent a hand. Behind them came Putt and his uncle, in hasty converse.

Sergeant Bradridge explained that he was here to capture Cecil Stark and take him back to the War Prison; while Thomas in a few words told the news, and related how that Peter Norcot had stolen Grace Malherb from her home and was even now supposed to be wedding her against her will by special license.

"'Tis him an' the Lord Archbishop against Mr. Malherb an' me an' Bickford here; an' I'll back us," said Putt; "an' if you want to make him a friend for evermore, you'd better lend a hand to catch this here Peter Norcot; for if I know him, the man will take a darned lot of catching. He may have scented John Lee's work and be off a'ready."

"Close up!" ordered Malherb. "Here's a locked door; but I heard voices behind it. Stand by while I break it down, and help me to take him if he shows fight."

He fired his pistol into the lock of the door, blew it out, and then dashed into the pitchy darkness beyond.

He felt a woman against him, and Gertrude Norcot's voice was lifted.

"Stand back, Maurice Malherb; you are doing a wicked and a dangerous thing. My brother——"

"Where is he?—let him answer for himself. Who are here in this Egyptian darkness? Grace—Grace—speak! It is your father."

"Dear father—oh, listen, I pray you, and try to understand. All is well—all will be well. Peter has been most good and generous. He——"

"Light!" shouted Malherb. "Who can breathe in this inky air? Hold the door, Putt. Let no man escape while I make for the window and let in day."

"Her eyes, sir!" cried Cecil Stark. "For Heaven's sake have caution! It may mean eternal blindness for her!"

"Not my eyes, dear Cecil—yours, yours! Oh, father, his eyes!"

"Damn everybody's eyes!" roared the master. "There are foul things wriggling here—as we find under the upturned stone. But see 'em we must, to crush 'em!"

Stark interposed fiercely, and the men closed in the dark.

"You shall not, sir: you know not that Grace's eyes depend upon it for their recovery."

"Who the deuce are you? Not Peter——?"

"Cecil Stark. I am here to marry your daughter at Norcot's wish and hope."

"That Yankee again! Light, I say, or I shall go mad!"

The men reeled and crashed against the window.

Stark lost his adversary for a moment, and Malherb, feeling the curtains, tore them down, got to the shutter behind them, and by main force dragged it off its hinges and broke the bolt.

A great flood of light burst upon the room, and every eye was dazzled by the morning sunshine. Cowering in one corner, clad in his black robe and bands, sat Relton Norcot; Stark stood against Malherb and turned with a cry of horror to Grace as the daylight streamed upon her; while she in her turn hastened to him. The brown eyes fell upon the grey, and each saw that the other's were unharmed.

Gertrude Norcot spoke to Malherb.

"My brother alone can solve this apparent mystery," she said. "I pray you to withhold your judgment and your passion, Maurice Malherb, until Peter is here to speak and explain all for himself."

"I'm waiting for him. I've nothing to do with anybody else. Where is he? How comes it that he is not here to marry my daughter as he intended, the knave?"

"'Twas for me that he had plotted this romance," said Stark. "I cannot hear his name abused. The fault is all mine. I——"

"I'll hark to you later. For the present your business is with Bradridge here. This was what your admirable friend, Peter Norcot, had planned for you: a quick return to Prince Town. Nothing could be better, I trow. And now, my clerk——"

He turned to where Relton Norcot had been sitting, but the clergyman was gone. Unobserved he had slipped behind the curtains, got out of a window and disappeared.

"He's wise," said Malherb. "He feels that fresh air and daylight will best serve his purpose now. We shall find him anon."

Then he approached Grace and took her into his arms.

"Come what may, I'm in time. This is the greatest day of all my life. You shall hear about that. I could forgive the world—I could pardon all my enemies! But let those who know where Norcot bides hasten to him and bring him hither. He must answer for much. And answer to me he shall before I break bread. That he should prove a knave!"

"If evil has been done," said Gertrude Norcot, "remember that my brother is still absent. Do not wrong the absent, Maurice Malherb. Wait until he can speak for himself. Yet ill has without doubt overtaken him. Nothing but sudden tribulation can have kept him from us."

Her prophecy was scarcely uttered when the man Mason ran past Putt and entered the room without ceremony.

"Come," he said; "'tis all over with 'em—both. One be dead an' t'other dying. They'm bringing 'em 'pon hurdles. Keeper Rowe heard gun-fire, and at last, after searching in the spinneys above an hour, he found what had failed out there. Oh, my God!—all up with poor master! Dead as a nail, an' drowned in his own blood by the looks of it."

They hastened out upon the terrace, there to find the soldiers and a dozen working-men crowding round two hurdles. With a bitter cry Gertrude flung herself upon one, and pressed her arms about her brother. In the bosom of death he reposed; his features were ash-coloured; peace marked his countenance. Upon each of his eyes the labouring men had set a penny to hide them, but the coins fell off as his sister flung herself upon Norcot's corpse, and underneath, filmed with death, yet reflecting something of the vanished man himself, his blue eyeballs stared upwards through a glaze. They altered his expression and brought back to it a shadow of Norcot's eternal smile.

"Shot, your honour," said the keeper to Mr. Malherb. "The rights of it be hid, unless yonder man have got enough wind in him to tell it. Us found Mr. Norcot wi' a hole blowed through his poor back by one of them damned spring-guns; an' t'other be shot too—through the side. Doctor's coming, for I sent a lad after un; but how it all fell out us'll never know, unless this poor blid can say."

While he spoke, Grace knelt by John Lee, and he saw her and smiled. Her arms enfolded him. He had lived to rest his head upon her breast and feel her tears flow.

"John, John—dear John; you must not die! All is well—you must live. There was something hidden. We shall never know. He said that I was blind, and he told me that my love was blind. And you knew what the mystery was. Oh, if you could speak! But you mustn't try till you are strong again. Rest—shut your eyes—God will never let you die, dear John."

The man spoke faintly.

"Is Mr. Stark there?"

"Here; here's my hand holding yours, Lee. I know now that you were right. He is dead—but you were in the right. Forgive me for doubting. Your love guided you, mine only blinded me."

"I didn't kill him," whispered John. "I meant to do it; but he killed me. He was dragging me away because he thought me dead. But I had strength left—and he fell back. Then a gun fired and he died. I can't tell who shot him. Be you there, Miss Grace?"

"My arms are round you, dear John."

"He meant to wed you in the darkness. He told me so after I'd fetched the master. He told me all. Now Norcot's dead, for I saw him die. You're safe—quite safe."

Malherb and a physician were hanging over Lee, but his eyes had already grown dim and he did not perceive them. The medical man shook his head.

"Only a matter of minutes," he said. "'Tis wonderful that he's lived so long."

"John Lee," said Malherb. "You're dying, lad; you're going the road we all must go. But know that you were in time. My daughter is safe, as you say. All's out. You've done your duty, and, though the hand of God killed this man, 'twas you who were the instrument."

"You've died for us, John!" sobbed Grace. Her cheek sank down to his and she kissed him.

"A good way to die—some use—some use. 'Tis better'n I deserve—above my highest hopes. Yet often I dreamed I'd die for 'e. Mr. Stark?"

"I'm holding your hand, John."

"Love her—love her while your heart beats."

"God knows that I will."

There was a silence, then a sigh; then Malherb lowered John Lee's head.

"He's gone—a truer Malherb than many who bear the name. Let every honest man mourn him, for his life was a pure life and his end noble. He has saved our honour; he——"

The speaker broke off and stared where Grace was weeping in Cecil Stark's arms.

"What right have you——?" he asked.

"The right that man died for, sir. His love makes mine but pale, yet, for Grace's sake and for mine, he laid down his life. I would perish for him if I could bring him back to the living; but that cannot be. Therefore I will live to bless his name. I will strive to be worthy of his sacrifice."

"And you, daughter Grace?"

"I was stolen from you, my darling father; and I should have been stolen for evermore but for what has happened. I love Cecil and have loved him since I first saw him, so pale and weary from his struggle with the storm. You saved his life for me, father. And dear John died for us; his last gentle words——"

"I heard them as well as you," said Maurice Malherb slowly. "I understood them. Who could not understand them? There is a solemn obligation that attaches to the last wish of any good man. I am in his debt for ever. God forgive me, for I used him ill. Come hither, Stark. To-day the lightning of heaven would strike me if I spoke one harsh word, or brought one pang to any human spirit. The Almighty has blessed me; yet his ways are past our understanding. That you who are an American—yet—yet of English blood. And there are closer bonds even than those of country. How simple were the last words he spoke! Here you stand—you two. So be it. Take my girl's hand, Cecil Stark. And before Heaven, remember what that dead man, with his last breath, said to you—'Love her—love her while your heart beats.'"

CHAPTER XIV

NEWS FROM VERMONT

EIGHTEEN months after Peter Norcot and John Lee were laid to their rest in the dewy and tree-shadowed churchyard of Chagford, there arrived a post at Fox Tor Farm with two packets from a far country. For Annabel Malherb from her son-in-law, Cecil Stark, of Vermont, came one commurson; and the second reached Mr. Richard Beer. His old companion and fellow-worker, Putt, had sent it.

After the catastrophe that terminated Peter Norcot's life, it is to be noted that Thomas Putt assumed a position of some prominence. Despite his family and his own straitened affairs, Malherb regretted the ancient Lovey's tragic end; but since she was now without further question dead and buried: at a cross road in a suicide's grave, the amphora returned to its owner; and Tom Putt, as the man responsible for this notable circumstance, received a very generous reward. With comparative wealth and the possibilities of a new country before him, Thomas accepted service under Cecil Stark, and when the young sailor returned to his own country, he took with him not only his bride, but also a white and a black attendant. Before the lover sailed for home, James Knapps had already returned in a cartel ship to his native land; but Sam Cuffee rejoined Stark as soon as the American procured his liberation; and Sam never lost sight of his master again.

At last the mournful mansions of Prince Town were empty and deserted; grasses and weeds blossomed where sorrowful feet had pressed their courts; the bats squeaked and clustered in their mighty corridors; decay and desolation claimed them all. Moor folk told how no sweet water would cleanse those floors of blood, how pestilence still lurked in the vaults and foul recesses, how shadows of mournful spirits here stalked together through

the livelong night, wailed to the moon and only vanished when grey dawn disturbed them. Dark stories gathered above the empty War Prison, like crows around a corpse. Rumour hinted of secret graves and murders unrecorded and unguessed; the crypts gave up human bones to the searchers; unholy inscriptions and curses against a forgetful God stared out upon dark walls at the light of torches; signs of infamy, of evil, and of all the passion, agony and heartbreak of vanished thousands appeared; hoarded horrors came to light; a spirit of misery untold still haunted the mouldering limbo. Yet as time passed, the forces of Nature worked within these barred gates and toiled by day and night to sweeten and purify, to obliterate and cleanse. The west wind and the rain, the frost and the mist, the sunlight and the storm all laboured here. Torrents washed and hurricanes howled into every hole and alley; up-springing seeds and swelling mosses softened the old sentry-ways upon the ramparts; green things broke the cruel contours of the walls; rusting and shattered iron at a thousand windows grew red and dripped streaks of warm colour upon the weathered granite.

Now the War Prison has vanished, and its story is told. In the vast archives of human torment the narrative fills but a brief paragraph; and therein all that pitiful history, to the last secret tear and the last act of malice, to the last noble self-denial and unanswered prayer, is recorded, to endure for time.

Mr. Beer read his letter aloud after supper in the servants' hall.

"A very understanding man was Thomas Putt, though cunning an' tricky as a fox, as I always told him," declared Kekewich, from his seat beside the fire.

"An' larned to write since he went to America, seemingly," said Dinah Beer. "There was nought that chap couldn't reach when he gave his intellects to it."

"He starts off with some general good wishes for all the company at Fox Tor Farm an' his Uncle Bradridge, if we should chance to meet with him," began Beer. "Then he goes on upon affairs in general in these words."

Richard read from Putt's letter:—

"'An' I be glad I didn't marry Mason's sister to Chaggyford, for to be plain, there's better here, an' a man of sense can have his pick of very fine maidens. But I ban't going to rush at 'em.

I've got my own bit of ground rented from Mr. Stark, an' pretty soil it is too. The first crop of wheat I takes off it will more than pay the expenses of clearing! That'll make your mouths to water, I reckon. Such crops as come up I never did see or hear tell about, an' if anybody had told me there was such fat virgin land in the world, just natural with never a load of muck on it since the Flood, I should have said the man was a liar. An' there ban't no Duchy in Vermont! An' never a bigger-minded, more generous gentleman living than Mr. Stark. Thousands upon thousands of acres he've got. Blamed if I don't believe as you could put Dartmoor down in the middle an' lose it! He'm a great farmer; an' I've heard un say 'tis the best of the human crafts after sailing. T'other sorts of business teach a man to be rich, an' powerful like, an' witty; but the land—where should us be without that? It keeps the world alive an' finds food an' clothes for all the humans on the earth."

"'Tis true," said Woodman. "An', what's more, I hold as the land be next to the Bible for keeping a man out of mischief—so long as he sticks to it. 'Tis the sticking does it. If Adam's self had but kept to his job——"

"Putt says a bit more; us can have a tell after," interrupted Beer. Then, amid real and lively interest, he narrated a matter with which, elsewhere, the master and his wife were also most deeply concerned.

Maurice Malherb sat and calculated the value of his next year's crop of wool. As usual, he set it as high as his hopes. He had sold the Malherb amphora for eighteen thousand pounds, and henceforth found himself and his farm in prosperous circumstances.

Now Annabel read slowly the budget from Cecil Stark. It was in the nature of a diary, and anon Malherb, pushing his papers and figures violently from him, spoke.

"For love of Heaven, leave that solid prosing, and look forward to the end. Grace—how is it with her? There should be great news. But he's so balanced, so self-contained, so methodical. He'll set things in their proper order though the heavens fall. Look on—look on to the end!"

"He writes from day to day, dear Maurice."

"Let him. We need not read so. Turn the pages quickly."

Mrs. Malherb obeyed, glanced forward, then uttered a joyful cry and dropped the budget.

"A boy—a precious little boy; and our sweet one well—quite well—before the letter sailed. 'Gloriously happy,' he says."

"I knew it! Pick up the letter. A boy! They have called him Maurice Malherb? That is certain."

She read again; then shook her head.

"Not so?" he asked with a heightened voice. "Then 'tis 'Malherb'—just the name. Yet I could have wished——"

"No, dear heart. They have not called him Malherb."

He started and flushed.

"Stark's name alone, I suppose? That is not well. I marvel they could do so improper a thing! Is it not enough that she has broken our hearthstone? Will she also forget us?"

"The little one is called John, dear Maurice—only that."

He was quite silent for a moment, staring before him. His warmth died away and then he spoke.

"Good—very good! Well thought on! I'm glad they've done that. And the dead would be glad. Perchance he is so. All is right with our girl, you say—you hide nothing?"

"All is as right as our love could wish."

"God be praised for His manifold mercies then."

She rose and came to his side.

"Do you remember, Maurice, how once you wished for Grace's firstborn, and planned and hoped that he should be a Malherb?"

"Forget it," he said. "'Tis but a fool's part to remember dreams."

He bent his head and his great square jaw hardened.

"No, no. This place follows me to the dust, and with me vanishes from man's memory for ever. None shall remember me after I have passed by, and none bear my name any more. Let it depart, like the mist of the morning, and be forgotten."

"May our grandchild be even such as you, brave heart! A man among men—generous, honest, just."

Malherb shook his head.

"Never—never. Rather pray that he follow his father. But not like me—not like me."

She put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

a joyful

—quite

s.”

e called

hen ’tis

”

marvel

hat she

.”

n. His

ve done

All is

Grace’s

herb?”

member

with me

member

y more.

en.”

art! A

r. But

PLYMOUTH
WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON
PRINTERS